



Journey



For my family

Mezzotint and the Artist's Book

A FORTY YEAR JOURNEY

Shirley Jones

Artist Writer Printer

Red Hen Press 2019

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Preface

In the summer of 2016, I was asked by the Powys branch of the Art Fund to give an illustrated talk on the mezzotint, to be held in our home. About twenty people attended, and after the talk I took them in stages to my studio, where I had laid out my tools, including my pole-rocker with a pre-rocked copperplate. I had also some of my Artist's Books on display. My Vandercook Letterpress aroused almost as much interest as my splendid Rochat etching press, and I answered many questions.

Later, while having tea and cakes in our kitchen, I was cornered by three of the group, who said that I should be writing 'all this' down. It wasn't the first time I'd been told this, but it was the first time I was told, quite firmly, that they would help. And they did!

These were not women with nothing else to do. It was the following March before we were able to convene again in our house.

Over the next eighteen months, Karin became my Editor. She is an Art Historian and had been a Senior Lecturer at what is now Cardiff Metropolitan University, and is also a weaver. Her academic experience meant she is sensitive to the desired tone of a text, and used to offering her observations tactfully, as well as providing advice when needed.

Later, as the selection of the images became a feature, Janet and Jenny became my Art Editors. Both are artists, who offered their views, but always with the reservation that my own choice was the most important.

Janet's background had been in both Science and the Arts, and she had been a lecturer at Bristol University. She is now running art classes, as well as being Deputy Chair and Life President of the Brecknock Sinfonia. With her past experience as a professional photographer, she produced a good number of excellent quality images, along with Jamie Carstairs from Bristol University's Special Collections Library, who digitised most of the images I finally selected. Jenny's background had been in Business Management and Events Organisation, and is now a successful practising artist. She offered sound practical advice about the quality of papers, and the publishing world, and raised considerations I found easy to overlook.

Like Janet, she also had that invaluable ‘good eye’, sound photographic knowledge, and enormous enthusiasm and drive for the project.

So my heartfelt acknowledgements for their huge help and support on producing the story of this forty year journey are for:

Dr. Karin Hiscock, Editor

Janet Foster, photographer and Jenny Care, Art Editors

Jamie Carstairs, photographer

Gwyneth Evans, who helped launch this book

Dorothy Harrop for her introduction and interest over the years

For his advice and expertise on the printing and layout of this book I thank
Adrian Lack, Senecio Press

And finally, I thank Ken, my husband, for his help and support, as always.

NOTE: In my Artist’s Books, my poems and my translations of Old English and Old Welsh are as important as the illustrations. Sometimes the text came first and sometimes the images. When reproducing the size of the large Artist’s Books to fit the size of this book it became apparent that on some pages it was difficult to read the text. I decided that the only way to cope with this problem was to include those texts at the end of the book.

Introduction

MEZZOTINT AND THE ARTIST'S BOOK – A FORTY YEAR JOURNEY

Shirley Jones, poet, artist, printmaker and sometime bookbinder, creator of Artist's Books has, over the last forty years, been responsible for every aspect of their making except for making the papers, all of which have been chosen with meticulous care. She learned the craft of advanced printmaking at the College of Art in Croydon, where she then lived, before moving a quarter of a century ago to her present home in mid Wales where the view from her studio could not be more inspiring, looking out on to the Brecon Beacons, an ever changing landscape, magnificent in all seasons.

Her work demonstrates a unique response to her native land and to its history, legends and folklore. More personal memories and reflections are connected with her South Walian background, her family and the animals with whom she has shared her life, dogs and, in particular, her beloved cats. No visit to my home, which normally included three cats, was ever complete without Shirley making a tour of the house in search of them and to see what they were up to before she left. People fascinate her, especially those for whom life means marching to a different drum, those who live 'under two moons' as she would describe it. Serendipity has often guided her choice of subject as in the case of the two local but very different mystical poets, Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne whose work is approached with great tenderness and depth of feeling.

Shirley describes her work as an attempt to uncover what is lost, hidden or shrouded in darkness or mystery, to bring a landscape, history or language to light. Her images are elegiac, spare and haunting, recalling memory like a melody played in a minor key. They are created in line and tone by etching and aquatint, often combined, and mezzotint, the last often described as 'the dark to light process', a neat metaphor for the act of revelation in which the highlights are burnished so as to impart an added radiance, as for example the sparkle on water or sunshine on a meadow.

Autographic intaglio plate making is slow and painstaking, but mezzotint, the first choice of this particular artist, strikes one as sheer wizardry. The time spent in multi-directional rocking of the copper plate to prepare it for holding the ink is alone a challenge of endurance. In her text the artist recalls that her largest plate, measuring twenty-two by fourteen inches, took her about three weeks to prepare. That is before starting on creating the image by patient scraping and burnishing the pits and spurs created by the rocker to varying depths in order to form a continuous tone image. How an artist even sees the image that way seems miraculous. The particular plate mentioned was to depict the horses of Geraint ap Erbin, the hero of a tenth century poem. And what an image! Here we see strength and delicacy combined in the power and graceful movement of the horses as, with flying ears and flaring nostrils, they spring from the darkness into life. When all is completed the crispness of the mezzotint surface is only good for printing about forty copies unless its life is prolonged somewhat by steel facing. Furthermore, when colour is required, a separate plate has to be created for each colour before printing them in order and in close register. The highest number of colours used by Shirley in one work numbers six. This was in 'Two Moons'. No wonder that since the autographic mezzotint method was revived in the twentieth century there have been few practitioners, particularly in Britain, and few of the images produced appear as book illustrations but rather as individual prints. Of all illustration processes mezzotint remains the most subtle and beautiful method of producing continuous tone ever invented. Neither photogravure nor photolitho, which succeeded it after the invention of photography, could match it for quality.

Shirley's preference for the mezzotint process is largely due to its suitability for capturing a feeling of mystery, of *otherness*, a quality conjured up by her rich and lively imagination. Subject matter has never been in short supply for this artist, not only because she is an accomplished poet but also she is intensely interested in the world around her, often fascinated to the point of travelling down many of its by-ways.

Working quite independently, as Shirley has always done, requires a degree of courage as well as skill. She explains the reason for her choice of name for her press as being because, like the little red hen, she did it all by herself. It was never her way to spend time acquiring knowledge of how things were done from others but rather to plunge in and have a go. From the early days she not only set and printed her own texts but also bound her own works, bookbinding having formed a part of her art training. This was

before Bill Matheson, Curator of Rare Books at The Library of Congress suggested that the binding might be done more profitably by others, since which time her books have benefitted from the specialist skills of other fine craftsmen though the artist has always been closely involved in the binding design. Though she never made her own paper, much time has been spent exploring the properties of many handmade papers from here and abroad used in the printing of both text and images. Some very local papers were made by Maureen Richardson of Herefordshire which include a paper for *Etched Out* a moving portrayal of the destruction of a complete rural community on the Epynt mountain range in which the papermaker included some of the red earth and bracken from the area.

Selling works of such artistic merit did not prove easy for they can never be cheap to acquire, but once it had been suggested that some of the great American libraries might prove a rich market, Shirley set forth to explore scholarly institutions in North America, with the encouragement and backing of Colin Franklin. Altogether she made eighteen highly successful selling trips. These were often long and physically challenging, but she received staunch support as publicist, organizer, chauffeur and general factotum from her husband Ken. Shirley loved it all, worked hard and won friends wherever she went, with her books.

Now that increasing age dictates the laying down of her tools she will no doubt continue to inspire book artists wherever they are. Always an enthusiastic ambassador for her craft, she has freely offered her services as a lecturer, illustrating her talks with slide shows, books and individual prints which her audiences are encouraged to handle for close examination to an extent not common in such circumstances. A reading of some of her own poems has also formed a part of her lectures in recent years.

It is gratifying to know that the standard never faltered, the Red Hen's last book, *The Quest*, received outstandingly favourable reviews. Her books have been acquired by Collectors, and over a hundred Rare Book Libraries throughout the world.

The complete collection of her books has been donated to Special Collections and Archives at Cardiff University, where they are in the process of being digitised for worldwide access. The physical collection can also be consulted by the public by prior arrangement with the Special Collections Team.

Dorothy A Harrop
Bibliographer, and author of, *A History of The Gregynog Press*

I have been making Artist's Books for forty years, and have produced twenty-eight books. So what is an Artist's Book, and how did I come to be making them?

An Artist's Book is not a coffee-table illustrated book, or a book about the life of an artist. Probably the definition most relevant to my work is, 'A book with as much visual content as text, and where there is clearly a collaboration between the writer and the artist'. Since I am both the writer and the artist, what I produce are traditional Artist's Books, or 'livres d'artistes', eventually hand-set with lead type, and printed letterpress by me, which makes the 'collaboration' total.

So how did I come to be making Artist's Books?

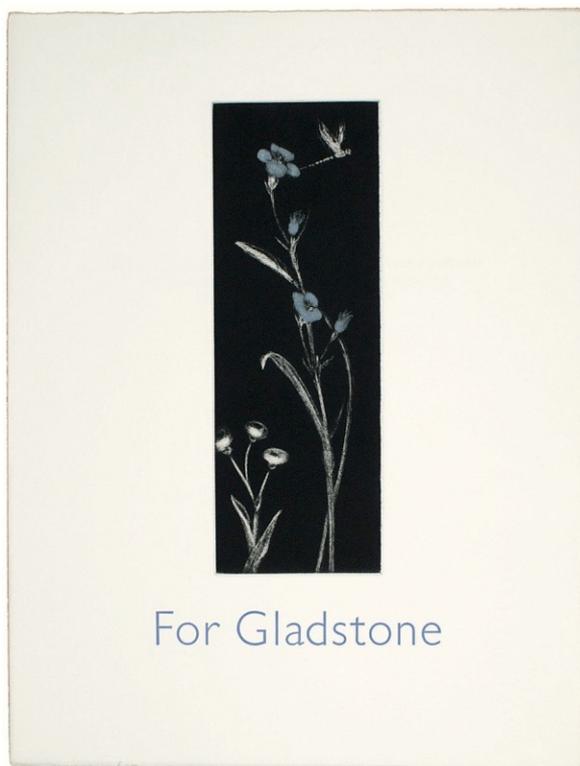
I originally graduated in English Literature, and indeed taught English for seven years, occasionally attending evening art classes. When I gave up teaching, I spent a year doing sculpture at an adult education class, before following a print-making course at Croydon College of Art and Design. I then applied for, and was eventually accepted on their international post-graduate course in print-making, having to point out that I was a graduate, and had spent two years following art courses. The Director was finally convinced when he came to our house to see the sculptures I had produced – none of them miniatures!

I was first introduced to mezzotint in 1975, during that post-graduate course in Advanced Printmaking at Croydon. Leonard Marchant, already a distinguished mezzotint

Leonard Marchant
mezzotint with aquatint
Courtesy of The British
Council Collections

Image of print by Leonard Marchant

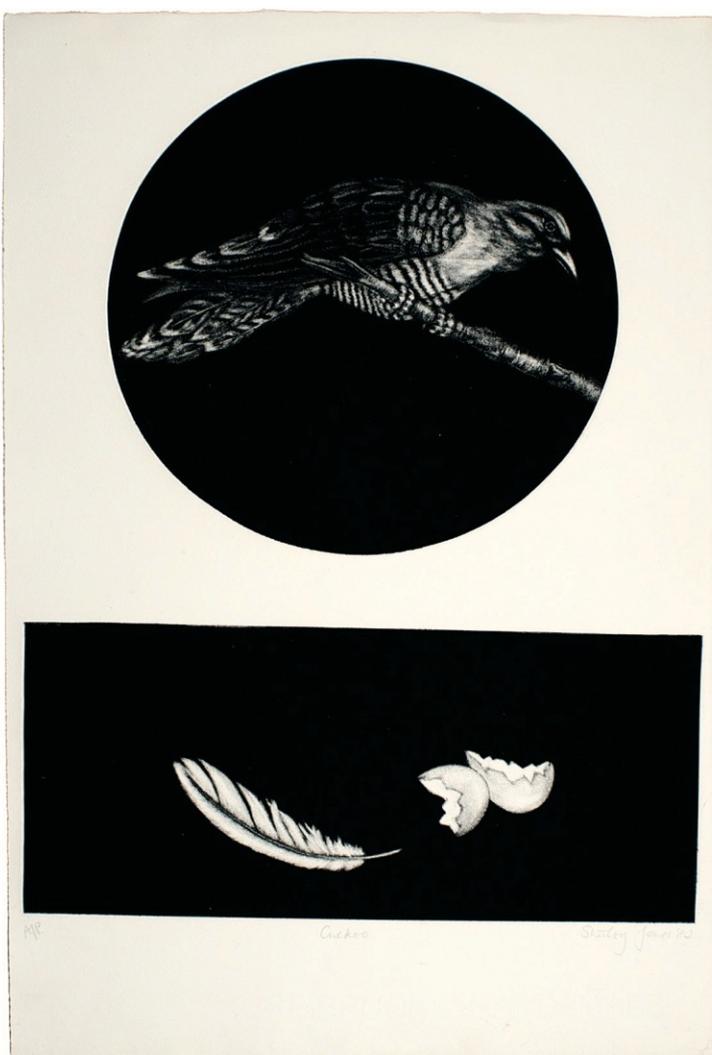
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artist, spent a day with us as a visiting lecturer, and I was entranced both by the rich, velvet blacks of his mezzotints, and the technique by which they were produced.

My fellow students were not impressed. I was a mature student, and unlike my classmates who were younger, and mostly American, I was not much in tune with the art trends of the time. I think I was the only one in the class, who actually rocked, burnished out and printed a small mezzotint.

Years later, I hand-coloured the flowers, and used it for a title page.



To the amazement of my classmates, I subsequently embarked on hand-rocking a zinc plate 14 x 12 inches in size, and during the following weeks, I was constantly being advised by them of much easier ways to produce the same results. None of them did. And no one suggested that a zinc plate was not a good idea! The image eventually, was of a cuckoo perched above a white feather and two halves of an empty eggshell. 'Why ever did you do a bird, Shirley!' commented a classmate, and I had begun to think that too! Even cutting the plate in two, and the cuckoo into a circle didn't make it more interesting. I was still wide of the mark as to what works in mezzotint!

And this was an end of year black and white group photo of me, in 70's style ethnic, seven of my fellow students, two technicians and the Course Director, Denis Masi.



And now, for anyone not conversant with the mezzotint process, it's a method of working from black to white. A copperplate is prepared to print a really rich black all over, by 'rocking' it evenly 30–40 ways with a serrated steel tool, called a rocker. The action is literally to rock the tool from side to side, digging the sharp teeth into the copper, to throw up a surface of burrs as it creeps forward. The image is produced by scraping or burnishing the rocked plate with the steel tools shown. These will act by scraping out or flattening the burrs of copper.

These are the tools.



And this a much later one of me rocking a plate.



Image of mezzotint by Yozo Hamaguchi

Redacted for copyright reasons

Grapes on Deep Black (1961)

Special Thanks:
Musée Hamaguchi Yozo; Yamasa
Collection, Tokyo

This much I had learned by practice, and scouring books on print-making, with scant information on the mezzotint process. I discovered, however, some wonderful prints by Yozo Hamaguchi, and a lot about the history of mezzotint! In the artist's *Grapes on Deep Black*, Nahoko Kambayashi of the Musée Hamaguchi has provided this interesting

information, along with providing the image: 'Yozo uses mezzotint in the black plate, the colours are by aquatint'.

The mezzotint process was invented in Amsterdam in 1642, and later brought to England, where it was used extensively for over two centuries, mainly but not always, as a means of reproducing paintings or portraits of famous people. Print dealers, keen to exploit what had become a very popular market, employed teams of technicians who specialised in copying particular features; clouds or faces or hands, for instance. By the second half of the 19th century, what had become a kind of mezzotint industry began to decline. On the whole, mezzotint had been established as a copyist art, and now there was competition from new printing processes, like lithography. The invention of photography was the biggest blow.

During the first half of the 20th century, mezzotint became almost a lost art, certainly an unfashionable one, but in the late 1940s the Dutch artist, Maurits Escher, produced eight mezzotint editions.

I applied to the Escher Foundation for permission to use his well known mezzotint, 'Dewdrop', but I couldn't afford their licensing fee!

However, my own learning process with regard to mezzotint was still some way off.

During that year studying Advanced Printmaking, I produced a series of my own words and prints, which I then bound, bookbinding being part of the course. I called it simply, *Words and Prints*, having little idea that I had produced an 'Artist's Book'.

My tutors didn't know what I would do with it. Charles Keeping, who had encouraged me in the first place, to take up etching as opposed to lithography, knew that it was not 'commercial'. He was immensely supportive, but his work was commercial: he was well established as an illustrator of his own children's books and illustrating the Dickens series for Folio. But at the end of that year, my external assessor

was Tom Phillips, also well-established, but as an artist who combined words and images. He told me Artist's Books were my *forte*, and I should stick with them. And of course, I did – for 40 years.

This is one image with the poem from *Words and Prints*.

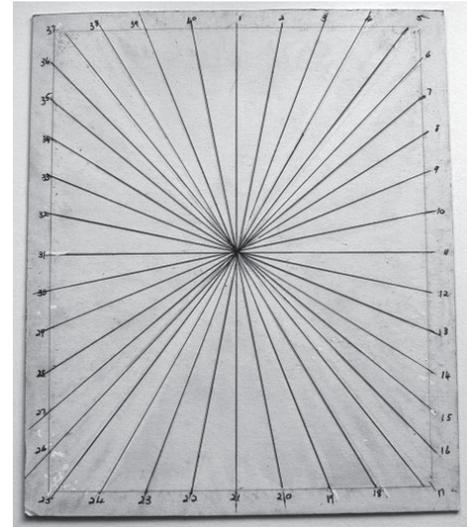


*Amongst the dead in Flanders' fields, in spite of war's intrusion,
 Poppies grew in all that mess, in blood-red profusion.
 And the generations left behind, chose the poppy as a token,
 A symbol of a hope that lives – a promise unspoken.
 And November the eleventh of every year was the date that was chosen
 To preserve, for two minutes, everywhere, a silence unbroken.
 And to ease the national conscience, a fine fiction was engendered
 That at dawn and dusk of every day, those dead would be remembered.*

I stayed on at the college for another year, and produced a second Artist's Book, *Windows*, which included one fairly small mezzotint, on copper! I had learned from my experience, rocking that large zinc plate the previous year,

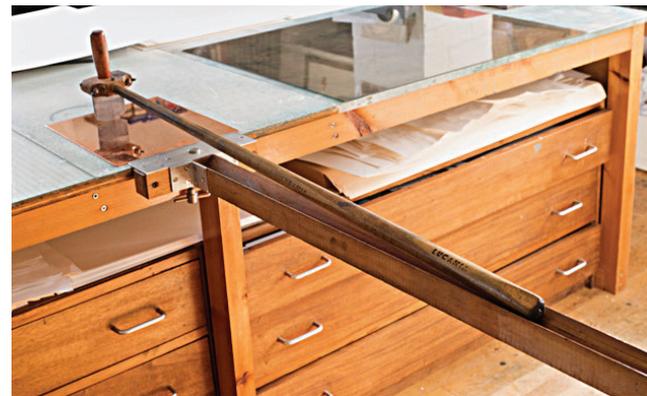
that it is pointless expending all that effort rocking a zinc plate which, after taking many proofs, will not produce more than a few acceptable images before the surface is worn down.

I had also learned, from Anthony Gross's *Etching, Engraving, & Intaglio Printing* that to ensure evenness of rocking, the plate should be moved through an arc of five degrees, for each successive track, because haphazard rocking can flatten the burrs raised by the rocker, and produce an uneven surface. To achieve this, I draw, on a piece of card, the tracks I am going to follow, ticking off the directions as I go along, as in the diagram:



In 1977 after leaving the college, I set up my own studio in a converted bedroom in our house, with an etching press not really suited to printing large mezzotints, I discovered later! But I had at least, learned that if embarking on rocking a large plate, a pole-rocking apparatus is an advantage. I adapted a traditional design, to allow the plate to be clamped to the pole without removing the handle of the rocker.

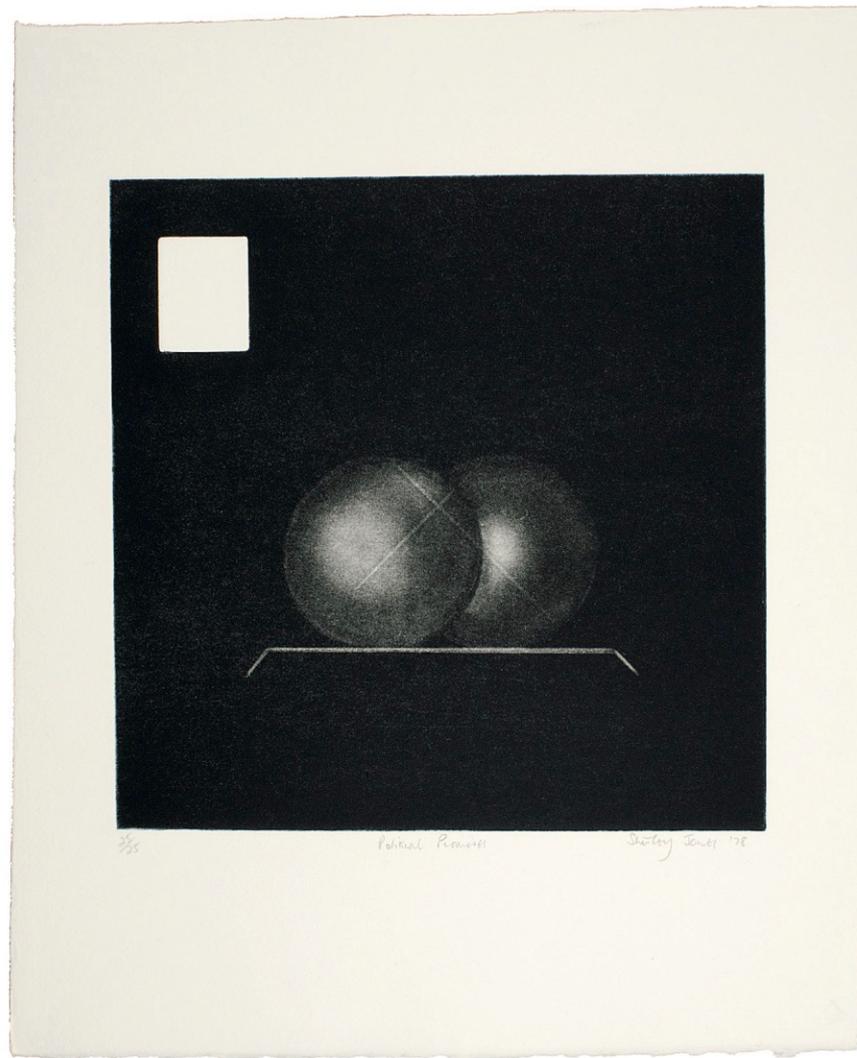
My own pole was a sawn-off billiard cue which proved ideal, the heavy rounded end not needing any sort of ballast. The grooved track is attached to adjustable legs, which can be aligned to the height of the work surface. All this was achieved with the help of a somewhat bemused local carpenter!



My pole-rocker proved a blessing for the first book I produced, a year later, in my new studio. I called it *The Same Sun*: nine poems and prints linked by a version of the mandala symbol appearing in each image. The book was altogether bigger in scale and more ambitious in scope, the themes social, political and personal, and it included two large mezzotints. Printing them on my small, not very powerful press, was a challenge for someone barely five feet tall. In order to get the pressure needed to produce a dense

black I had to push the press bed with my stomach, while reaching to turn the wheel! My efforts were rewarding, and I was elated many years later, when two American Rare Book dealers commented that they were the finest modern mezzotints they had seen.

This is one of the mezzotints from the book, and the disgruntled few lines that accompanied it:



*You promised us a Brave New World,
Not one that's just a pale reflection of the old,
Where cancelled hopes grin back,
However much we strive to see new signs.
And the bright future that we pinned our faith on
Just mocks us blankly, now it's here.*

I called it *Political Promises*.

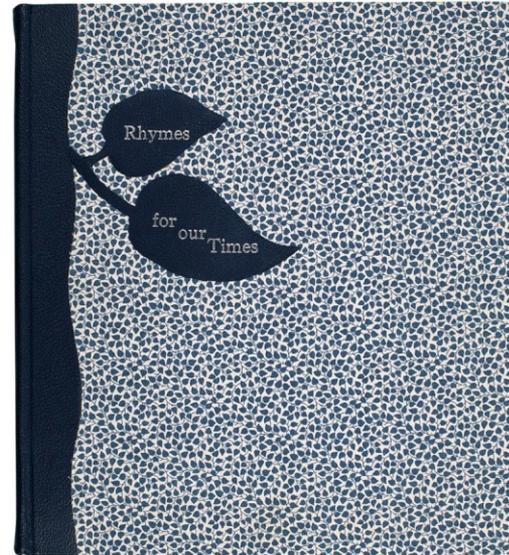
Me with that small press, in my equally small, and very cluttered studio.



In 1979, I produced, *Rhymes for our Times*, an oblique look at traditional nursery rhymes, with ironic additions by me. This one I called, *Woman's Own Story*. The text of this poem (and other poems reproduced too small to read) can be read at the back of this book.



My binding for
Rhymes for our Times.

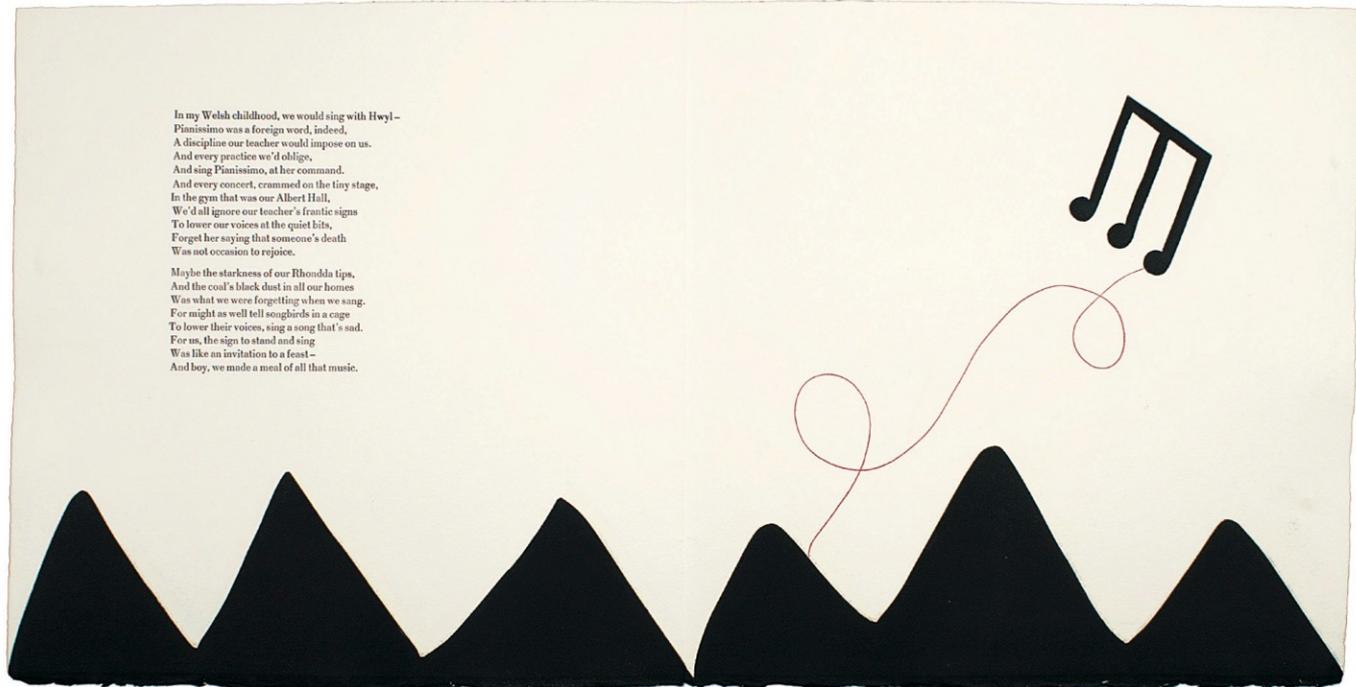


By my next book, *Backgrounds*, in 1979, I had begun to see the possibilities in colour mezzotints. With less reverence for the medium, I rocked a large circle of copperplate, which I had cut out on my band-saw, filing smooth the edges before and after rocking. I printed it in bright orange, and this was the first of the many suns and moons of various sizes, I produced over the years, and which was to become my hallmark. For my abstract image, I printed the circular plate inside a semi-circular cut-out plate, a deeply-bitten etching with aquatint. This was printed in dark blue, vaguely suggesting a wave.

*'Truth is Beauty,
Beauty Truth'*



Backgrounds also featured this double-page spread. It was called simply, 'Singing' – certainly a part of my background!



My binding for
Backgrounds.



In 1979, when I was working on *Backgrounds*, two of my books, *Windows* and *Rhymes for our Times* were selected for showing at the *Open & Closed Book* exhibition, at the Victoria & Albert Museum. It was the very beginning of what would be a long-standing relationship with the V&A, and it came about as the result of Robert Kennedy, Librarian of The National Art Library, who was organising the exhibition,

visiting Basilisk Press, to see the full range of private press books then available. He asked if he could include a copy of *Windows!* Later, *Rhymes for our Times* was also included in the exhibition.

Charlene Garry was the first to sell my books, at Basilisk Press, her book shop at 32 England's Lane in Hampstead. She was an enthusiastic American, who invariably embarrassed me, by calling to everyone browsing in the shop, to come see my latest book, while enthusing about its merits. But she sold many of my books, until she succumbed to cancer a few years later.

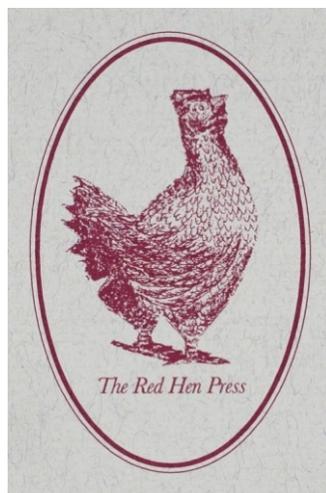
The following year, 1980, I produced, *Greek Dance*, which consisted of five etchings and a long poem I dedicated to the people of Lindos, after a family holiday on Rhodes, and a triptych I called *Sunflower, Rainflower, Pale Morning Star*, which was all I could manage during two difficult years, health-wise.

Scop Hwylum Sang, which I translated as, *Sometimes a Poet Sang*, featured mezzotint suns or moons, but proved to be the most significant book I have ever done.

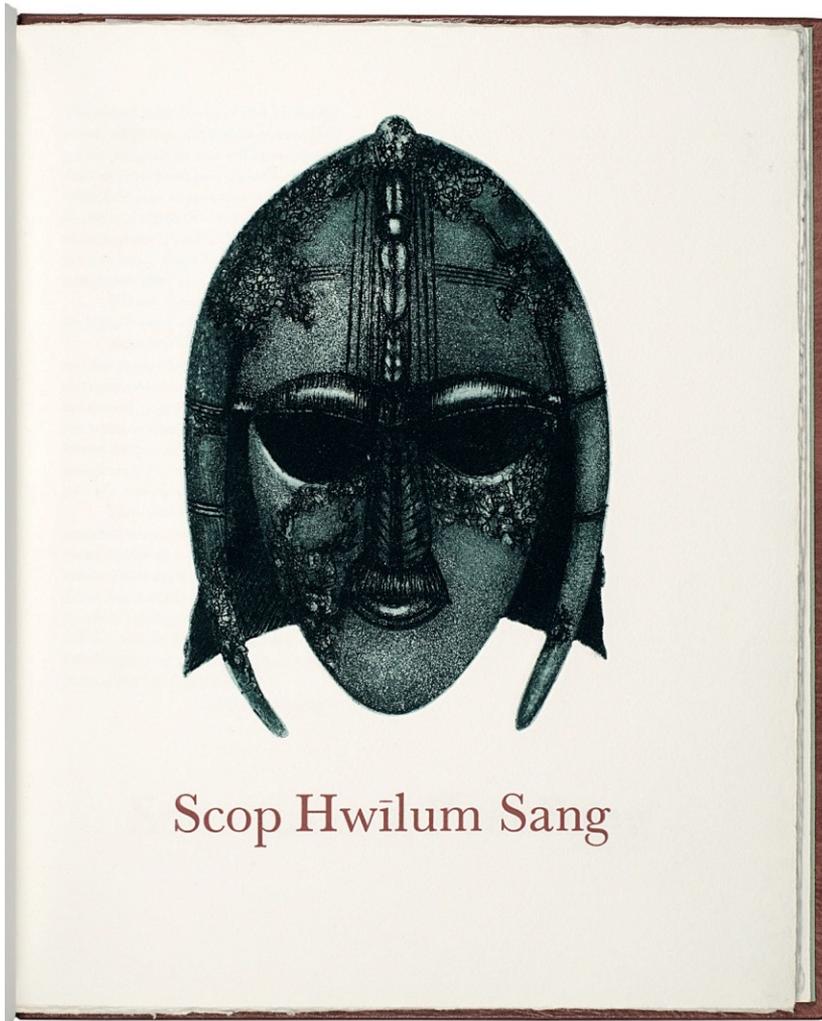
In the autumn of 1981, the sad, bleak landscapes of the Romney Marshes had evoked for me the spirit of the Old English poetry I was required to study years before. With the images clear in my mind, I realised I wanted to set my translations by letterpress, as well as print them, alongside the Old English. With shining new founts of lead type, and no experience of type-setting, I began, stubbornly solving the problems as they arose.

I finally printed my translations in dark green, alongside the Old English in dark red, but these formal columns of type determined the shape of the images facing them, as well as the choice of colours. I had never done anything so disciplined before, or been so satisfied with the result. It was a gruelling year in the making. It was an edition of twenty-five, which sold out in a year. And I had found the

confidence to name my press: The Red Hen Press, because like the 'Little Red Hen', I had done it all by myself. I was also little, and in those days I had red hair.



Seafarer from
Scop Hwīlum
Sang



I chose for the title page, the striking Sutton Hoo Helmet:

And this the amazing binding and box, Denise Lubette of the Society of Designer Bookbinders made for *Scop Hwīlum Sang*:



One of the reasons this book sold out so quickly was the result of a most fortunate coincidence.

I was due to make my first visit to America in the spring of 1983, accompanying my husband on a business trip. But a few months earlier, Colin Franklin, at that time, President of The Antiquarian Book Association, and a distinguished bookseller and collector, wrote to me, commenting that he had just acquired six of my Artist's Books. One of the books was an edition of just six copies, and dated 1975, so what was going wrong, and could he come to see me. He did, and added to his collection, *Scop Hw̄lum Sang*, as well as buying the proofs, which usually went into the bin! More importantly, he told me that America was the market for my books, and offered his name, as an introduction, to several Rare Book Librarians and booksellers, especially in the west and mid west.

His name was an 'Open Sesame'.

Further help was provided by Denise Lubette, who kindly offered introductions to collectors of Rare Books.

That trip was the first of eighteen book-selling trips to America, but it all began with that first trip, crazily zig-zagging by air and by car across that vast continent. It was exhausting, but I sold twelve books.

A significant outcome, of that first trip, was my meeting with Bill Matheson, Curator of Rare Books and Special Collections at The Library of Congress. Having ordered copies of each of the four books I showed him, he asked who had done the bindings, and I told him proudly that I had. He replied, 'You should get someone else to bind them. What is inside deserves more than what is on the outside'. So the four bindings of *Scop Hw̄lum Sang* were my last, though I'm always involved in the design of the bindings.

Future trips to America were better organised. Over the years, many of those Rare Book Librarians became good friends, and in time, I found a warm welcome awaiting me in the great Rare Book Libraries in this country too. It was all very different in the years I spent, initially, lugging my heavy books around London galleries, to be told they liked

them, but couldn't sell them. I had yet to learn that I was looking at the wrong market for my work.

Bertram Rota, the distinguished London book dealer, began to buy my books early on, and continued to buy each new book I published. I used to enjoy my visits to their Long Acre shop in Covent Garden, and being greeted by, and getting to know, an appreciative John Byrne. Even after he retired, we continued to exchange Christmas cards, and news. I was grateful that Anthony Rota maintained the friendly, personal contact I had come to enjoy at Rota's. In terms of my professional life, I ploughed a fairly lonely furrow, so I enjoyed appreciation when I produced a new book, advice when I needed it and just sharing book-related anecdotes.

And in time, there were private collectors in this country, as well as in America, notably Beth Cooke, who bought every book I ever produced. Dear Beth bought my last book just months before she died, well into her nineties.

It was in 1983 that I had my first London solo exhibition, at the Margaret Fisher Gallery. It was not a huge event, but Colin Franklin, who attended the opening, encouraged me to read some of my poems, something that was to become a regular feature at future openings of my exhibitions. It was a recognition of the importance of the words as well as the images in my work.

My next book was *Impressions*, in 1984. It consisted of eight etchings, my fleeting impressions of that first visit to America. These images were not suited to mezzotint, being lively and colourful, with poems and sketches to match. Even the strange, lunar landscapes of Arizona, which had enthralled me, called for an evening light that was almost ethereal.

They were printed as single sheets enclosed in folders of a lovely blue Richard de Bas paper. This was a handmade paper from a French mill, not easily located, in the Central Massif. We arrived in a thunderstorm, at 9 a.m., and to our



amazement, so did a coach load of tourists. It seems the mill was a tourist attraction, but I had come shopping for paper, so I received an effusive welcome.

Arizona

Then a visit to a Montreal art fair in the autumn of 1984, and a chance to see a portfolio of Mario Avati mezzotints rekindled my love of the medium I had not used for some years. It has always seemed to me that the Japanese are the

ones best capable of exploiting the mysterious, metaphysical quality of mezzotint. It probably has much to do with the strength of a philosophy behind an art, which is true of the deceptive simplicity of their watercolour tradition. Nevertheless, Avati's technical mastery is superb, and in the case of this portfolio it was the use of a single word of text accompanying each of the four prints that registered; grace and economy of style always impress me.

Avati's *Chouettes*
2011
© Victoria and
Albert Museum

After negotiating with the V&A for one of Avati's mezzotints, I was referred to Dacs Licensing, the firm holding the copyright, at an affordable fee, but then charged far more by VA Images.

Image of mezzotint by Mario Avati

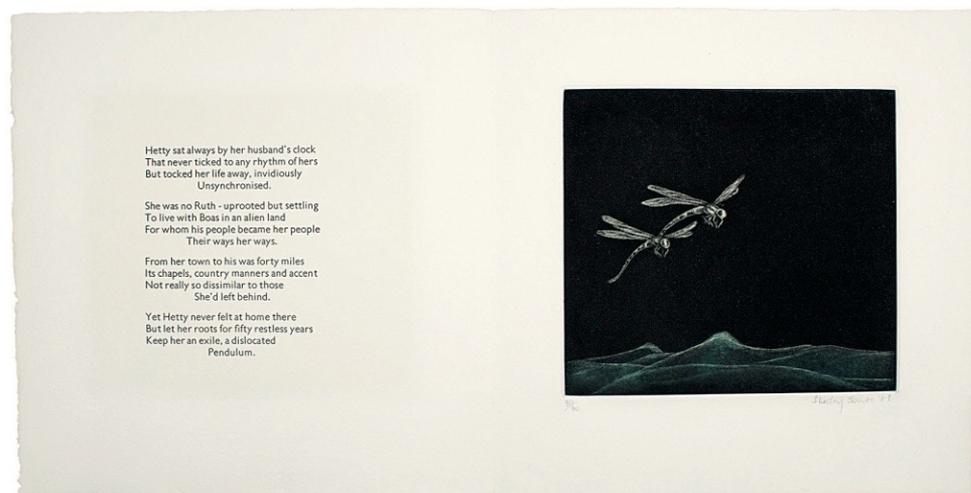
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It was in the course of this trip that my next book began to take shape.

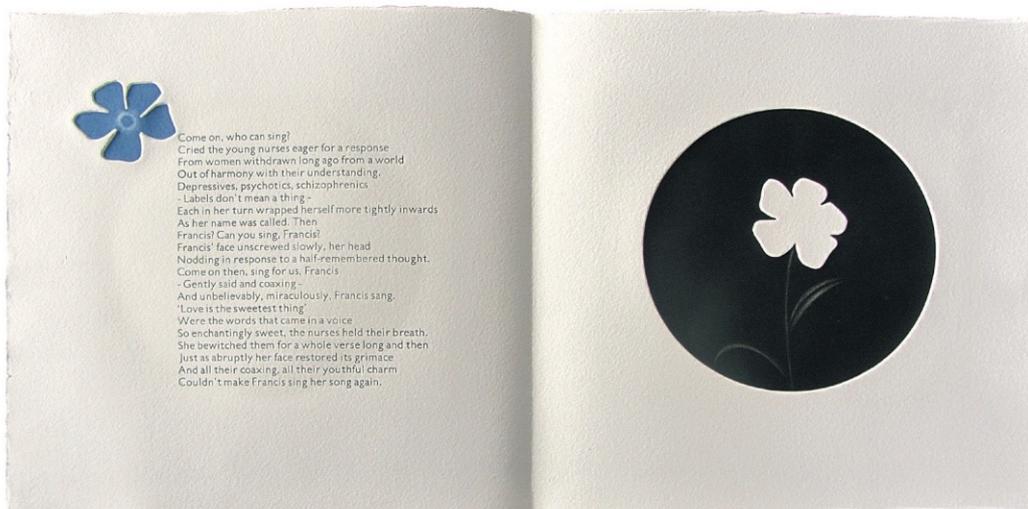
My poems are very often a response to an experience that has disturbed me, recorded in isolation from anything else I was experiencing at the time. The isolation of the image in a mezzotint can work as a perfect counterpoint. I saw a possibility of illustrating my dark poems in a way that would not be too disturbing: the poems could be bleak or sad, but because a mezzotint offers an image softly, out of its blackness, it can at once distance its subject and enhance it. *'La manière noire'* was perfect for these dark poems.

Hetty

This one was
about my mother-
in-law:



And this is Francis, a long-term psychiatric patient I met only in the stories told me by our daughter, a young student nurse, who made all her stories joyful, because she was young – and joyful.



Francis

When I returned home I began work on the plates, and embarked on another learning curve. For proofing the plates I had used off-cuts of a sized paper, that is paper to which gelatine or rosin had been added during the manufacturing process, which gives greater water resistance. But I had long been addicted to Crisbrook Waterleaf, ‘waterleaf’ meaning unsized. It was a handmade paper by the Kent mill, Barcham Green, and I loved the sumptuous softness of it, because of course, it was unsized. It seemed perfect for mezzotint.

It was not!

Drying the mezzotints proved the real problem. It must be the sheer density of ink in a mezzotint, coupled with the depth of the plate in thick, unsized paper that produces a tension in drying. If the prints were flattened under boards while still damp, the image developed a corrugated look. Left to dry naturally, the paper looked kinked, and in need of pressing.

Eventually I found that air-drying the prints for several hours before flattening under boards worked – most of the time. If it didn’t, I tried re-wetting the prints and drying under boards, which seldom worked, nor did re-wetting and air-drying. I tried putting them back through the etching press wet; it lost the plate mark and left a shine. At this point, I knew I should give up, and the lesson I learned the hard way, was always to proof on the paper I intended to use for the edition!

Obviously, there was a high level of waste, and taking fresh prints to replace those spoilt in unsuccessful drying, eventually wore down the rocked surface of the plates, and resulted in a reduced edition size of thirty copies. I made the decision then, to have my plates steel-faced in future, even though the copperplate looks so much more attractive than the dull grey of the steel facing. It extends the life of the plate by 100%, and since the edition size of my books is usually forty, and the proofing of a mezzotint can often result in up to ten proofs before I am satisfied with the result, steel-facing is essential for me.

I called my book *A Dark Side of the Sun*, and it was finished in the spring of 1985.

I sent the prospectus to all the collectors, dealers and Rare Book Librarians who had bought my earlier books, including the British Library, since they had already bought *Scop Hwīlum Sang*.

Instead of an order, I received my first demand from the British Libraries Copyright Office for a copy of *A Dark Side of the Sun*. In reality, this meant six copies, since the other five Copyright Libraries had equal claims.

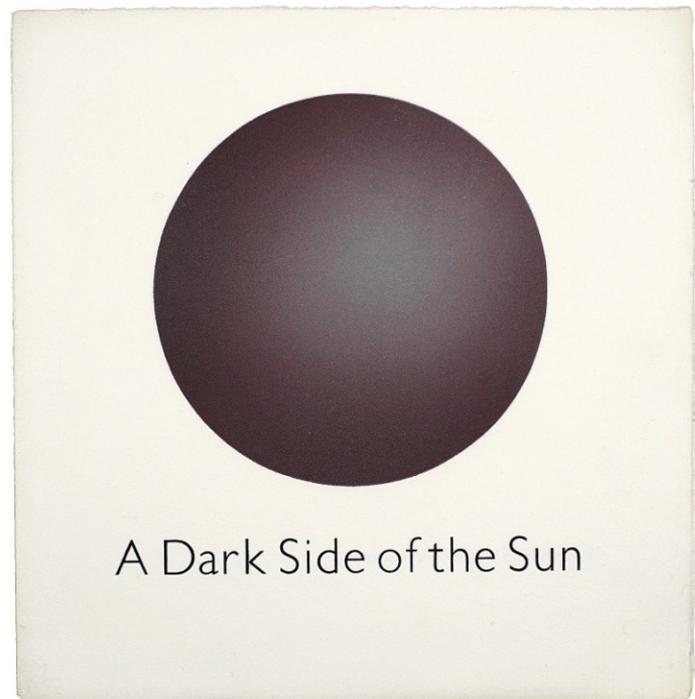
I was devastated, and wrote a long letter, explaining that I could not comply with the requirement, pointing out that this was an Artist's Book, consisting of eight mezzotints, the text handset, and printed letterpress, on hand made paper, each copy enclosed in a handmade box and slip-case, the cost to the binder being £60 each. The price of the book was £500, so if I complied with these copyright claims, I would stand to lose a considerable amount.

The letter was not acknowledged, and it was the beginning of an ongoing saga.

In the autumn of 1985, I was asked to give a workshop on mezzotint at the New York Center for Book Arts, followed by a talk on my work.

That evening an entire class, along with their tutor, came to my talk, at the end of which they gathered round to meet me, and look at some of my Artist's Books on display. I heard one of the students address the tutor as 'Carol', and I asked, rather hopefully, 'Is your surname "Wax?"' To which, she replied with sharp New York humour, 'I wouldn't have made up a name like that!'

And that's how I first met Carol Wax, doyenne of mezzotint printmaking.



For many years after, we met by arrangement, during brief visits to New York, at places like hotel lobbies. Years later, we would call in for lunch at her studio flat, in upstate New York. It became a regular stop on our drive up the

Hudson River, to various University Rare Book Libraries, *en route* (and sometimes well off it) till we got to Vermont.

In 1990, the New York publishers, Harry N. Abrams finally published, in hard cover, and in 1996, published again in soft cover, Carol's illustrated book on mezzotint, the result of five years of arduous research and writing. Published in this country, by Thames and Hudson, under the title, *The Mezzotint/History and Technique*, it is recognised as the definitive authority on mezzotint, required reading and enjoying for anyone seriously interested in mezzotint.

Image of Carol Wax's book

*The Mezzotint:
History and Technique*

Redacted for copyright reasons



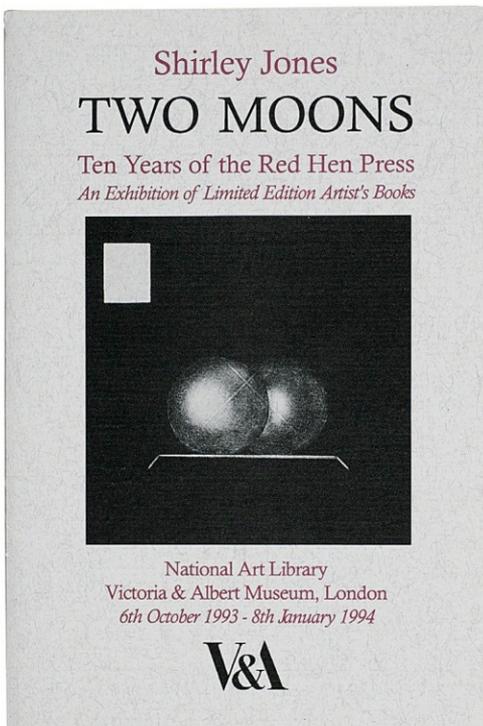
This is a photo of Carol and me, in 1998, coming down the steps of the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

Carol gave me permission to feature any of her wonderful mezzotints in my book, and for sentimental reasons, I chose, 'Under Wraps'.

The nose belongs to Carol's much loved, and now much mourned Weimaraner, Cecil.



In 1986, I sent my prospectus to the National Art Library, at the V&A, and received a letter from the new director, Elizabeth Estève-Coll, stating an interest in acquiring examples of my recent work, and suggesting she come to me, at my home, rather than asking me to bring my work to the Museum. And she did! Not only was she charming, she acquired three books for the Museum, and enjoyed the apple cake I had made for her!



The V&A continued acquiring my Artist's Books, and in 1994, I had an exhibition of my books and prints there, and gave a public talk about my work.

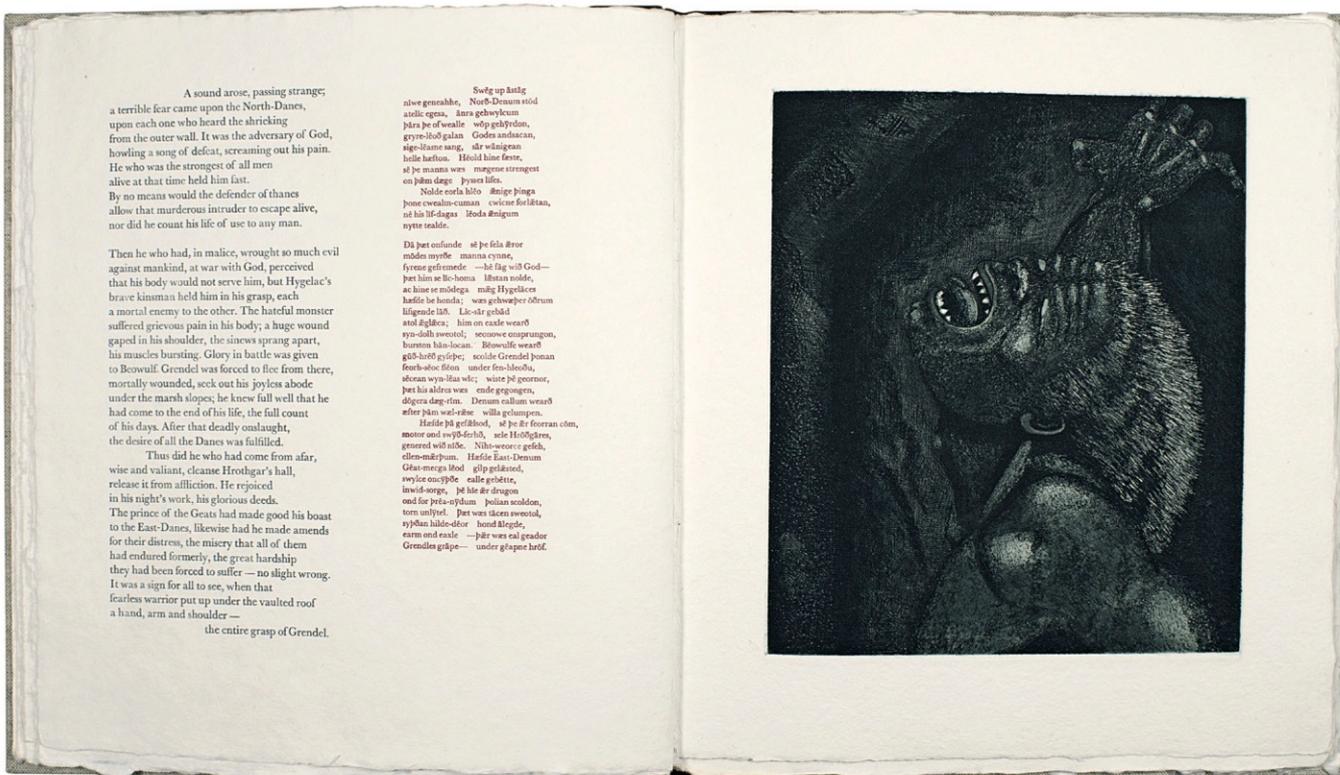
Ellor-gāst is the book I produced in 1986.

I have always chosen the technique best suited for the subject. Usually the entire book would be either mezzotint, or etching combined with aquatint and/or relief printing. Sometimes the choice of paper was a factor; and it was with *Ellor-gāst*, my theme in *Beowulf*.

Beowulf has little of the charm of the Old English poems I translated for *Scop Hwīlum Sang*, three years before. It is the longest and most famous of all Old English poems, first and foremost a series of great yarns, based largely on the hero's encounters with monsters.

Ellor-gāst, the title I gave my book, means a spirit from elsewhere, and it was the 'otherness' that held terror for *Beowulf's* audience, and fascinated me.

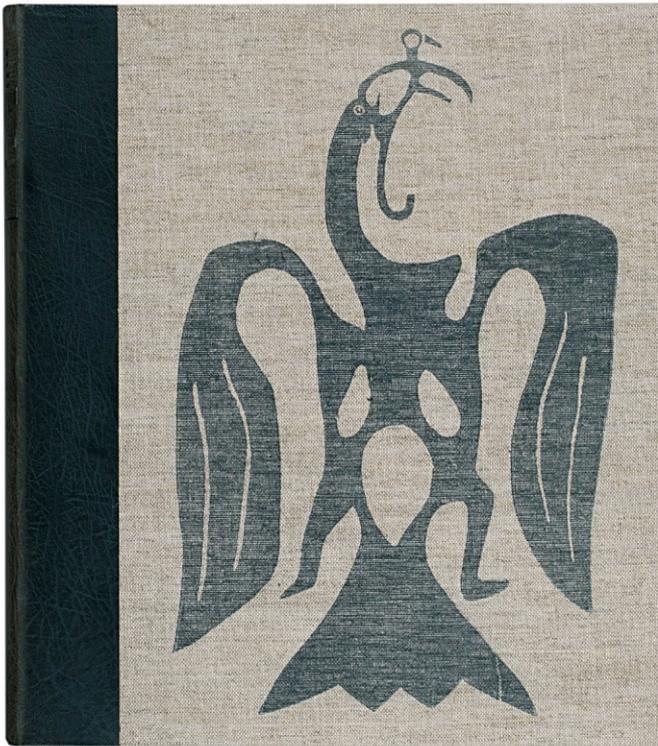
My image is of the monstrous Grendel, in the terrible battle with Beowulf, who finally tears off 'the entire hand and arm' of Grendel, as the monster screams out his pain.



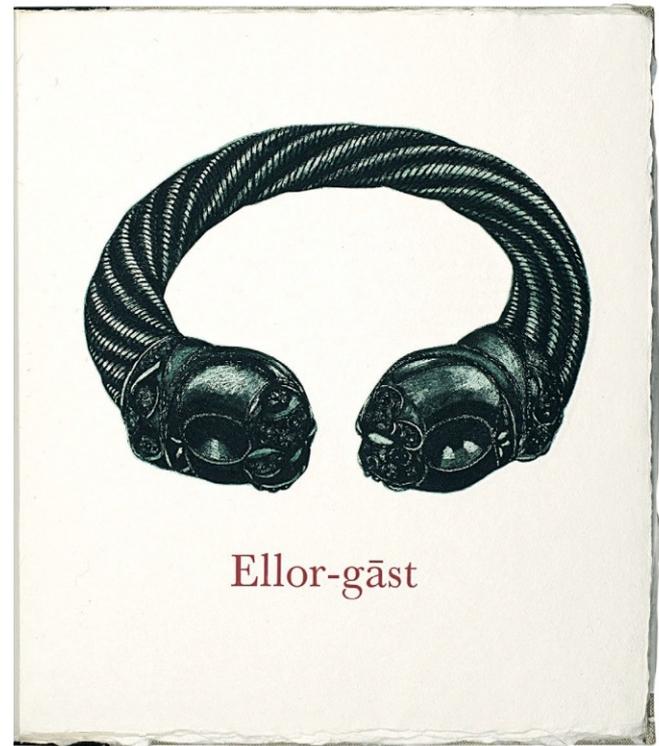
Once again, it was the paper that proved such a problem: a handmade paper from France, I had fallen in love with. It was especially made for me, by Jacques Brejoux, at Moulin du Verger, from a mould to fit my page size. The thick, unsized and fibrous paper was, I knew, useless for mezzotint, but perfect for the coarse-grained aquatint, and cross-hatching of etching; perfect, I thought, for the images in *Ellor-gäst!* And I was right.

What I was hopelessly wrong about, was not testing how it worked for letterpress printing. And it emphatically didn't!

I did solve the problem, eventually, but it was another lesson lengthily learned. By running through each soaked and blotter-dried page through the rollers of my etching press, with a sheet of copperplate on the bed of the press, the text printed quite well. But this had the effect of pushing all the 'bumps' through to the back of the paper, so that I had to put it through my etching press again, to flatten the reverse side, re-damping in between. All this entailed over a thousand runs through my etching press before the paper was smooth enough to print the text by letterpress.



Cover of the book



Title page: Sutton Hoo Torque

I printed a little book afterwards, about the making of *Ellor-gāst*. I called it: *A Cautionary Tale* by Shirley Jones.

In 1987, I received a reminder that the Copyright Receipt Office, at the British Library, had not received a copy of *A Dark Side of the Sun*, and a demand for a copy of *Ellor-gāst*. In reply, I stated that the position remained unchanged since my original unacknowledged letter, as could be seen from the enclosed prospectus. I had published an account of *The Making of Ellor-gāst*, in a limited edition of two hundred, retailing at £20. I accepted that the Copyright Offices were entitled to six copies of this, but *Ellor-gāst* itself was an Artist's Book, in an edition of forty, and retailing at £475. If I was forced to give six copies of every Artist's Book I produced, I should have to give up making them, and return to teaching or printmaking.

This resulted in a response from Philip Madden at the Claims section, assuring me that they would be making no further claims regarding *A Dark Side of the Sun* and *Ellor-gāst*, now that I had clarified the situation regarding these 'limited edition' books.

But the saga was not yet over.



Having wrestled for nine years with an etching press too small for the demands I made of it, in 1987 I traded it in with few regrets, for a larger press. This is my new Hunter Penrose press.

I was about to embark on a portfolio of etchings I had struggled to print some years before, on my small press. Being 19 x 16 inches in size, for these prints the larger bed size really was essential.

Nocturne for Wales demanded etching and aquatint as its medium not the soft quality of mezzotint, but it did feature mezzotint suns of every size and colour. It was a book of my own short stories about growing up in the Rhondda Valley. The suns counteract the bleakness of the landscapes!

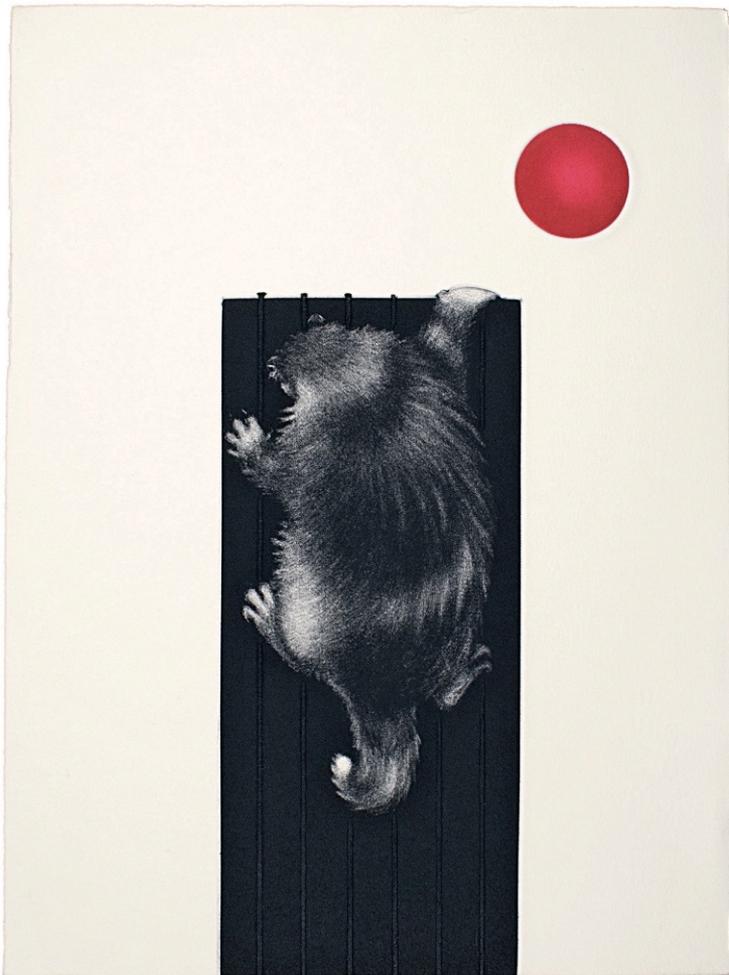
Bread of Heaven is the title I chose to convey the importance to me of singing, when I was a girl. It was part





My etching of a Welsh chapel

Gladstone climbing a fence

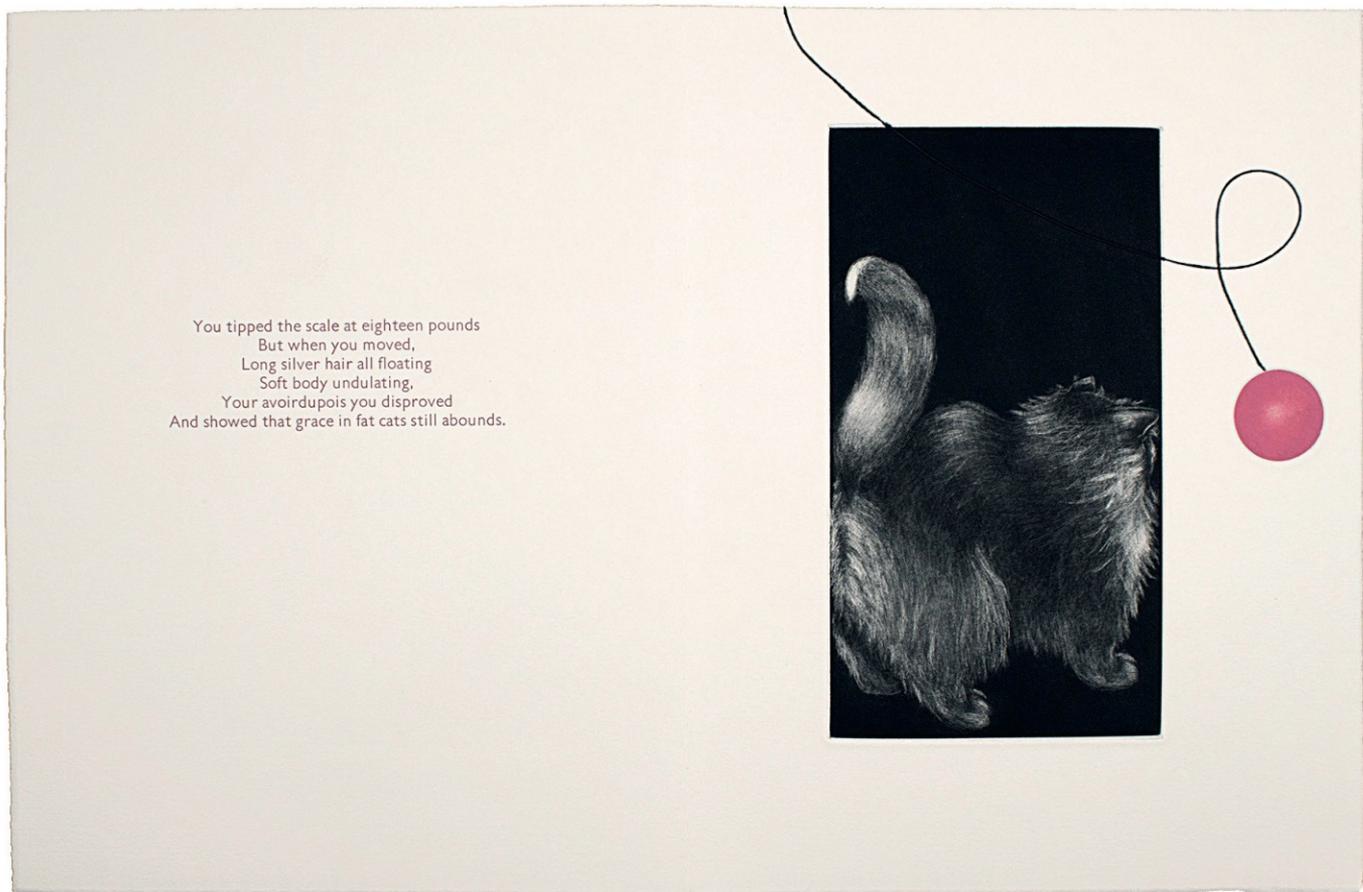


of the fabric of my life, choirs – Bach, Mozart, *The Messiah*; the Eisteddfodau, of course.

But it was Welsh chapel singing that could really move me. I recall standing at the railings outside Nazareth Chapel one Easter ‘Cymanfa Ganu.’ Inside they were singing *Cwm Rhondda*, just months before I was to leave the Rhondda, for university. I couldn’t intellectualise about my reaction to the power of that singing. I simply responded once more to the richness of that music, only dimly aware that in a faith as austere as their lives, that nonconformist congregation found manna for their soul in their singing.

In 1988 a small family tragedy prompted me to make a small-scale book, and the obvious medium to capture the soft fur of a long-haired cat was, of course, mezzotint.

Gladstone was a lovable and rather portly Persian cat, not the brightest of cats, nor the most graceful: he could leap for a five foot fence ... and miss. But he had a huge capacity for loving. Late afternoon he appeared, from whatever basket, or dog’s kennel, or large pottery bowl he had decided to spend the day in, and demand a cuddle. His timing was based originally of course, on the children’s arrival home from school, but he failed to notice that the pattern changed as the children grew up and went different ways. But when you picked him up, you could never have wished for a more rewarding lump of rapturous, purring cat to cuddle. When he died, he left a great gap in our lives. I made the book for

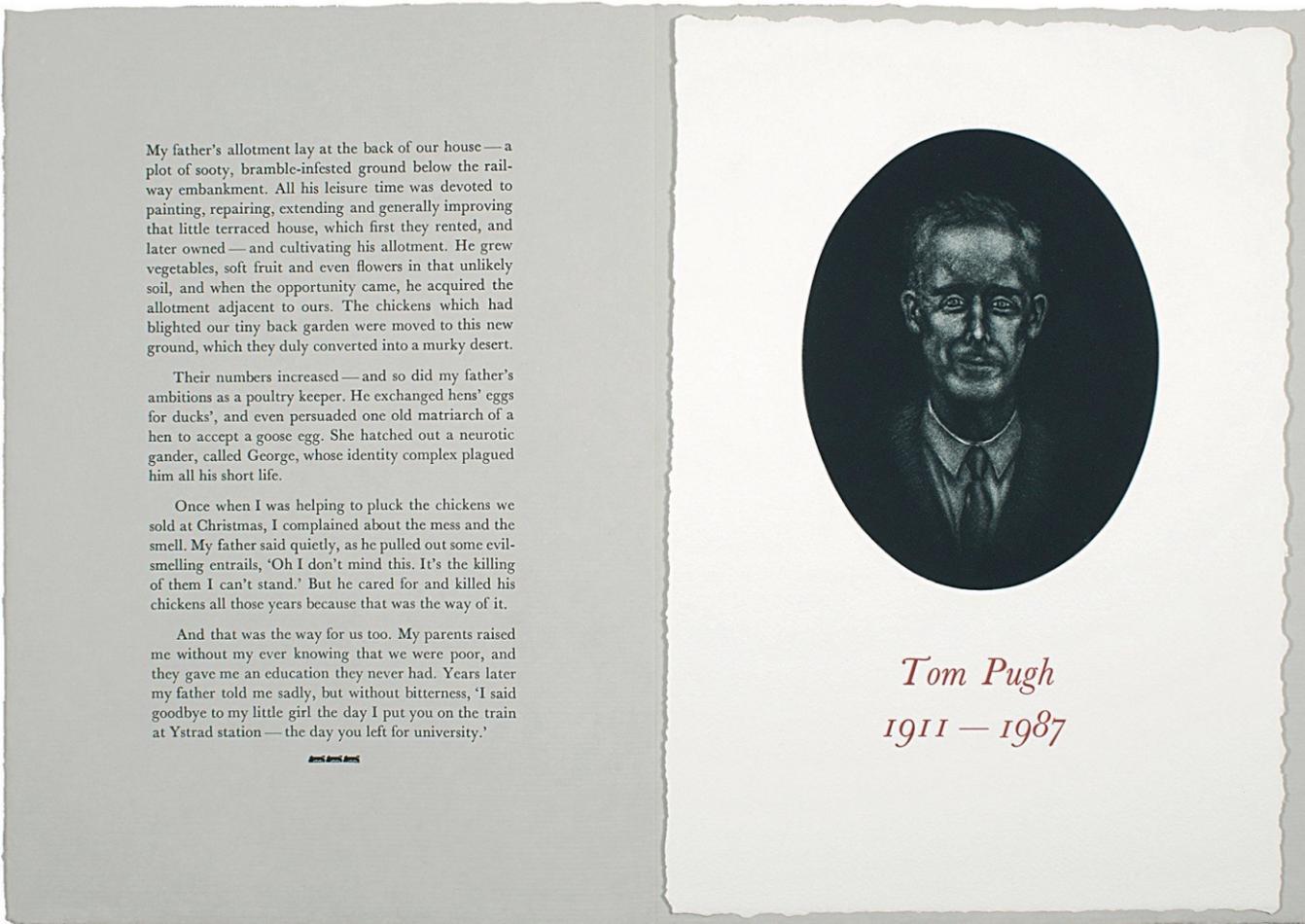


myself, for my family, and of course, for Gladstone, which is what I called the book.

Gladstone with a balloon

In 1989, I sent a copy of *The Making of Ellor-gāst*, and a set of the short stories from *Nocturne for Wales* to Richard Christopher, Head of the Modern British Collection at the British Library, together with a copy of the letter from Philip Madden, from the 'Claims Section', stating that they would be making no further claims for these 'limited edition' books.

I received a sympathetic letter from Richard Christopher, acknowledging the difficulties the Library had, defining whether *Livres d'Artistes* are books or prints, and therefore not eligible for deposit. He also expressed a hope that some day I could collect some of the poems accompanying the prints into a book, 'for it seems a shame if they would be lost to us'. Which I thought was very nice of him, but didn't sound very hopeful, with regard to my Artist's Books.



Portrait with text



The death of my father was no 'small family tragedy'. He was an unemployed miner when I was born, then for forty years, a railwayman who could 'turn his hand to anything', a necessity in those hard times, a source of satisfaction in later years. He was quiet, self-effacing, with a sweet tenor voice when he sang, with my mother playing the piano. And when he died, people said often to my mother, 'He was a gentle man, a gentleman.'

The book I made for him in 1990, I called *Five Flowers for My Father*. It's a set of five mezzotints of wild flowers juxtaposed with objects significant in his life; the title page has a tin mug with five roses in it, and the final page, my portrait of him. Each mezzotint is enclosed in folders, printed with details of his life story.

Miner's Lamp

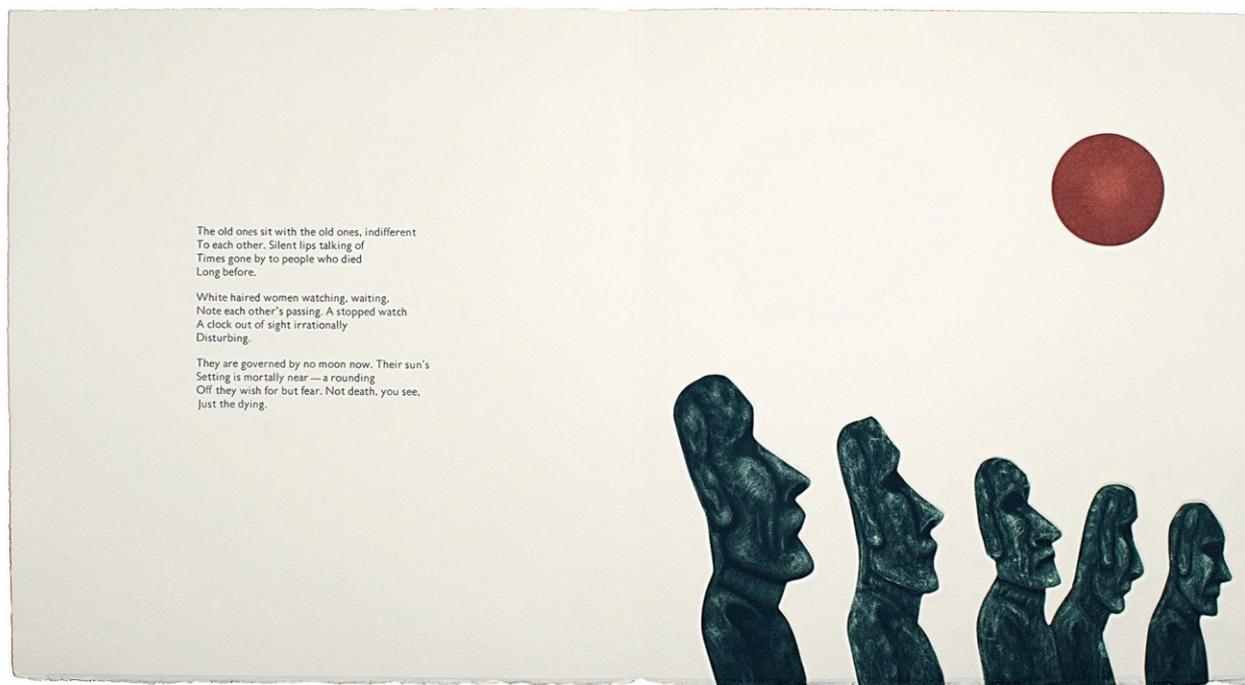
Two Moons was the title I gave to a book of mezzotints I published in 1991, though its subject had bothered me for a long time before that.

‘Paint me a thousand poppies and two moons’ was the demand a young schizophrenic, made of our daughter, at the time, a student nurse. It was an image that haunted me an apocryphal seven years before I came to make the book.

Two Moons is not just about the so-called ‘mentally deficient’, it’s about social misfits, and the very old who slip uncomfortably in and out of senility. My poems were about those who live by the light of ‘two moons’.

The nine mezzotints were inspired by primitive art or by nature at its most enigmatic.

A nursing home, and its very old ladies inspired a poem and this image I called *The Old Ones*.



My old ones began, framed in a single plate, as four old ladies who recalled the Easter Island figures. Gradually, they seemed hemmed in, and the moon I'd given them feeble. So I cut them out with a bandsaw, and added a fifth figure – more of an authentic Easter Island figure than had existed inside the plate. And I gave them a setting sun.

I couldn't paint a thousand poppies for Yasmin, but I made her as beautiful an image as I could. The holestone is

from County Antrim, and, like the Cruckstone of Cornwall, was said to have healing powers. I put it in for Yasmin, and it's her second moon.



Yasmin

The poppies required two plates for each image. The etching ink used for the key plates was black mixed with dark green, so when printed, the burnished out stems registered as green, while the density of ink, only possible in a mezzotint, registered as dense black. The key plates, printed first, had all the details of the poppies, but the second plates, inked in red, and printed afterwards, are what introduces the third colour.

Careful registration, with a template on the press bed is, of course, essential, to produce a crisp image.

It's a six plate mezzotint, and the most complicated image I have ever produced, but also my favourite, and the favourite of many others, it seems: it's been used widely for exhibition posters and catalogues, and one Rare Book Librarian said it had pride of place in his home, and was a bone of contention with his daughters, as to who should inherit it!

Ordinary Cats, in 1992, began with the first print, *The Parvenue*. I had been commissioned by Austrian friends to produce a mezzotint of their cat for a 40th birthday, mezzotint being the perfect medium to portray the softness of a cat's fur. I knew they wanted to frame it for wall-hanging, hence the size of it, the plate being over 14 x 12 inches, with the generous surround making it 21 x 17 inches.

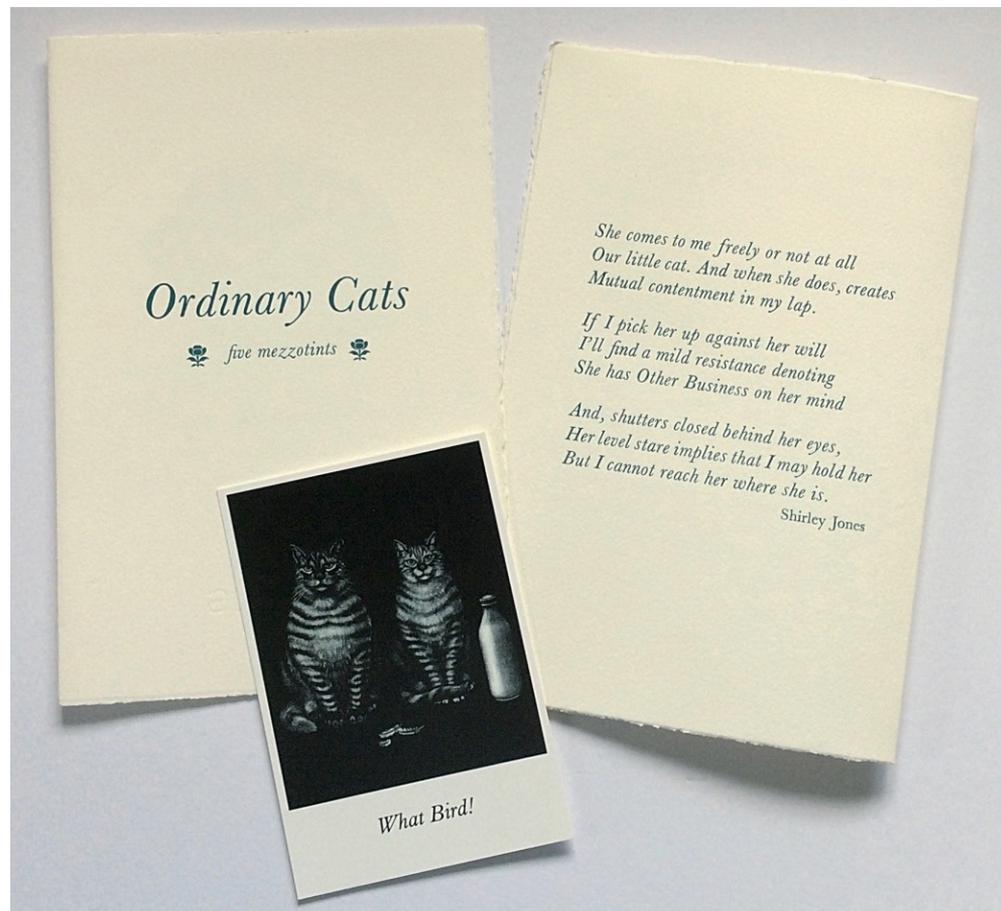


Now a print is not a one-off, like a painting; it would make no sense to spend all that time working a plate to produce one print. I needed it to become part of an edition. I had also enjoyed capturing the personality of that cat.

Hers was a feline rags-to-riches story. She'd been rescued from an Italian gutter by our Austrian friends, and in time-honoured tradition, she became the princess of their elegant apartment. Accustomed to treating with *sangfroid* their fine collection of Art Nouveau glass, she would prompt a relative to whisper to her sometimes, 'Parvenue!' Such coarse reminders she treated with disdain, and like Saki's cat, would look squarely at him for a moment, then fix her gaze serenely in the middle distance.

I love cats, and conceived the idea of producing a portfolio of five cats, setting and printing a small booklet of poems and sayings of many cat lovers, to enclose in the portfolio's book-form box.

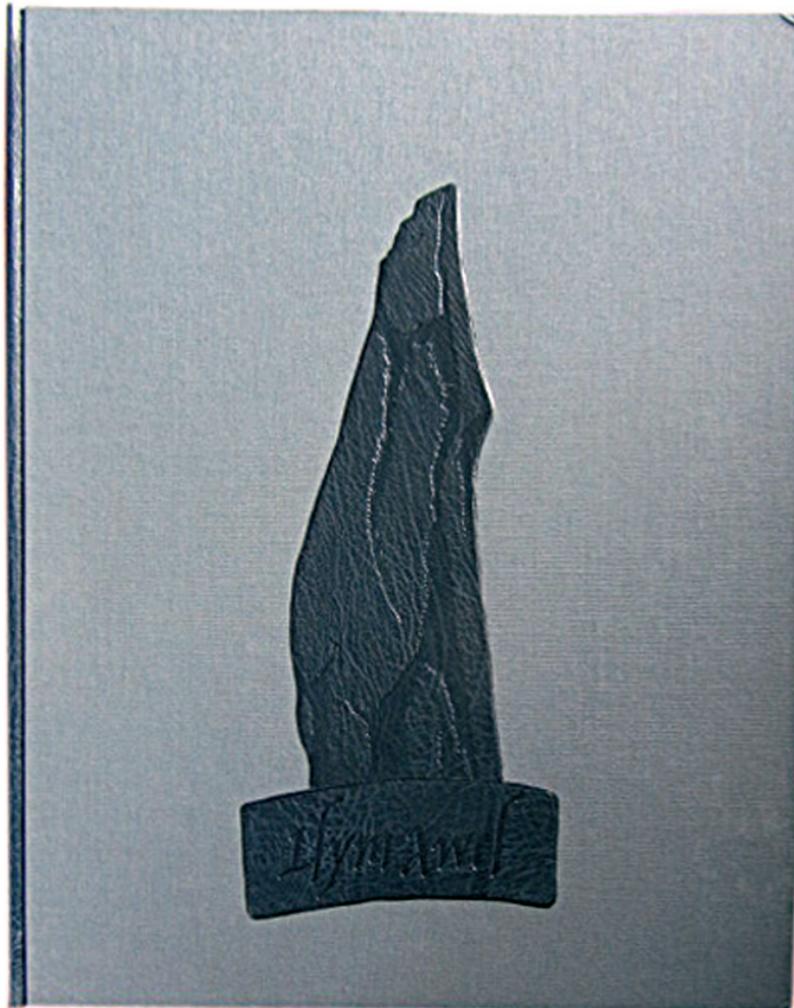
I called the book, *Ordinary Cats*, but as Colette remarked, there are no 'ordinary' cats!



A post card of one of the large mezzotints I called, 'What Bird!'

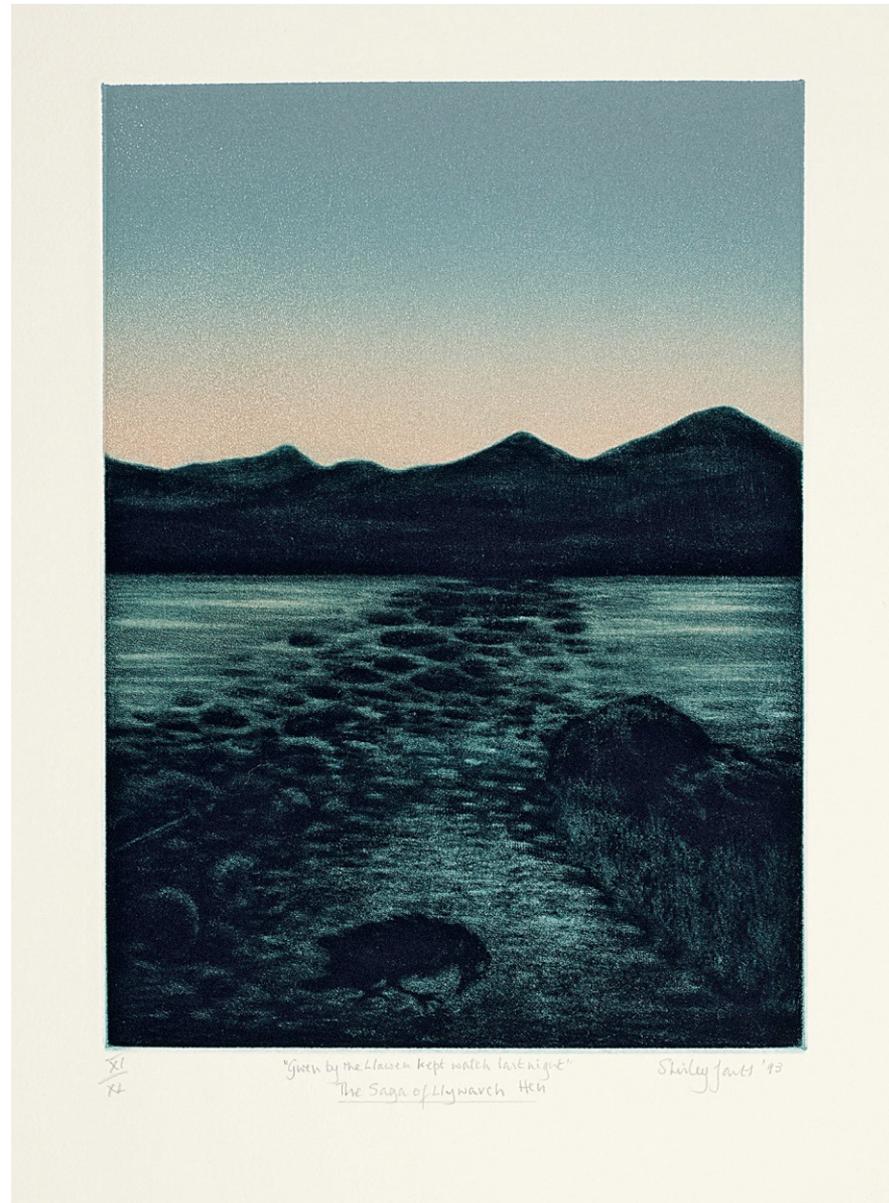
In 1994, I published a collection of my poems, set and printed by Gabriel Weissman, with images reproduced from the original etchings and a mezzotint in my Artist's Books, in an edition of five hundred copies. I called it, *Pick Me a Bunch of Roses*. Since Richard Christopher, at the British Library had, back in 1998, expressed a hope that I would collect some of my poems accompanying the prints into a book, I intended letting him know. But this being the year we moved house and press back to Wales, it wasn't until the following year, that I actually wrote to him, by which time, it seems he had retired!

Llym Awel was my first move away from Old English to Old Welsh Literature. Its publication coincided with our move back to Wales, in 1994, after living in or around London for thirty years, and *Llym Awel* had just won the British Book Design Award for Limited Edition Books.



Llym Awel: Sharp the Wind

Mezzotint image of raven
picking the bones of the
dead



The book had been two years in the making, and consists of my translations of selected verses from early Welsh poetry, with an introductory passage for each image.

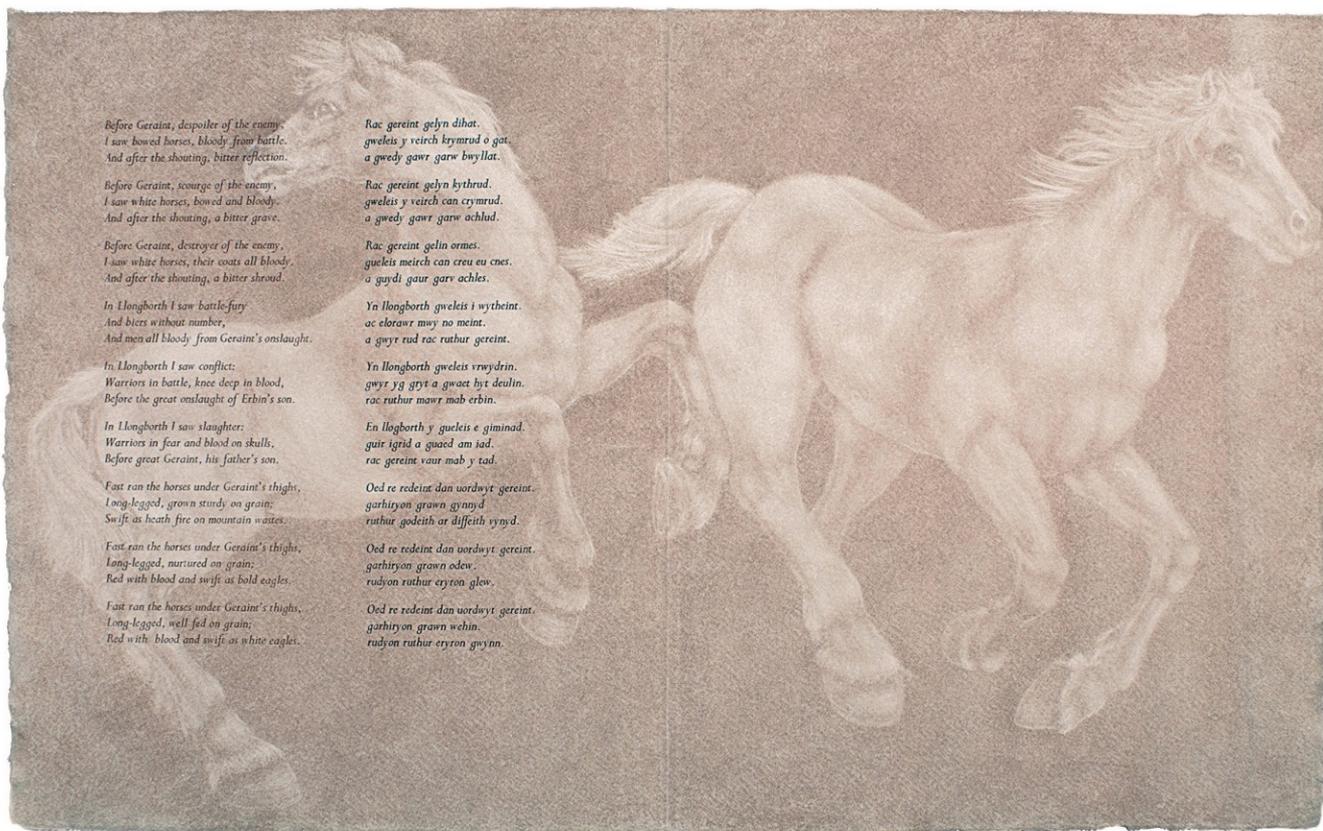
As I stated in my initial introduction to *Llym Awel*, Welsh literature has been a continuing experience for fourteen centuries. The earliest poets who composed in Welsh flourished towards the end of the sixth century. For its first seven hundred years, the background to Welsh poetry was internecine struggle, and warfare against foreign aggressors: the Angles, the Saxons, the Normans and finally the English.

The images I made for the book are all mezzotints and are mainly Welsh landscapes, the enduring background to

the poetry's powerful images, of times when the winds of change howled for centuries across Wales and *Llym Awel Sharp the Wind*.

But my 'tour de force' was not a landscape. It was a mezzotint plate, 22 x 14 inches, which took me almost three weeks to rock, before burnishing out the white horses of Geraint fab Erbin, the hero of a tenth century poem. I succeeded in overprinting, in two different colours, the Welsh verses alongside my translations for this double page spread.

*White Horses of
Geraint fab Erbin*



And now for *Falls the Shadow*.

In the autumn of 1993, I had seen a magazine feature on Angkor Wat, and survivors of the Cambodian killing fields, their faces still haunted by horrors orchestrated by a criminally misguided idealist. I was, at the time, re-reading T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and I saw a connection. There have been many movements in history 'to heal the Waste Land'; many were altruistic; not all were laudable. I decided to explore the gulf between Man's ideals, and their attempts to realise those ideals.

After months of research, I wrote six essays, collected under the title, *Falls the Shadow*, each of which became a self-contained chapter, introduced with a shell as a symbol of the ideal, since a shell is as fragile as it's beautiful. Cut out from a deeply bitten etched plate, and printed blind, that is without ink, white on white paper, each shell introduces a chapter in history, where human frailty came between the conception of an ideal, and putting into practice. A sepia mezzotint is the visual metaphor for the shadow that falls. Hence my title, taken from, *The Hollow Men*:

Between the idea

And the reality

Between the motion

And the act

Falls the Shadow

The powerful imagery of Eliot's *The Waste Land* permeates the book, and I wanted to introduce each of my essays with a quotation from it – an extra layer in a multi-layered book. Unfortunately I didn't realise until the format was really taking shape, that although Eliot wrote *The Waste Land* in 1922, he didn't die until 1965, there were potential copyright problems – big problems, as it turned out, because Eliot didn't want his poetry to be used in conjunction with any imagery. All my protestations to his publishers, Faber & Faber, that I wasn't illustrating his poems landed on deaf ears. A time consuming correspondence, and the negotiating skill of my husband, resulted in permission to reproduce fifteen lines, provided that they were not used 'in conjunction' with any imagery. To prove this I had to send an entire multi-layered 'chapter', of four pages.

Hymnen an die Nacht headed my chapter on Hitler's perversion and exploitation of the values of German Romanticism. As Andrew Graham Dixon has written, 'The final solution was the appalling translation, into genetics, of that idealising strain within German Romantic aesthetics that dreamed of total purity'. My image, a mezzotint on copperplate, is cut to frame a flower in bloom, the rhizome as disturbingly sinister as the children's hands.



The book was published in 1995, and shortly after, I was showing my work at an exhibition of Artist's Books at the Festival Hall on the South Bank, and I noticed that *Falls the Shadow*, in particular, was attracting a lot of attention with a group of mature, Middle European students, but no one approached me, though many others did. At the end of the day, when most of the students had gone, an older



man came to my stand, also very interested in *Falls the Shadow*, but especially with regard to the paper. I was very tired, and tempted to just wait for him to go, but I pulled myself together, and explained that it was *Somerset* paper, perfect for the blind-printed shells in the book, that the paper was new to me, I had never used it before, but I would certainly use it again. At which point he said, 'I'm so glad, because I made it!'

And we both went away, glowing.

Shirley Jones
Artist • Writer • Printer
Retrospective Exhibition, National Library of Wales, 1995

"I want to buy every book she has published. They are the most beautiful things you could ever imagine. I'm absolutely stunned to have met so much talent in so small a compass."
 Ian Skidmore, *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 1995

"An artist's book which has been outstandingly well designed with planned integration of different crafts, yet bold and adventurous. All that a private press should be."
 Winner, *British Book Design Award 1994*; Judges' comment

"*Llyn Awel* may be compared to some of the great illustrated printed books which grace the shelves of the world's best-known libraries. It follows the tradition which regards books as beautiful objects which also inform, educate and entertain."
 Anne Price-Owen, *Printmaking Today*, 1995

"The particular strength of Shirley Jones's work lies in the synthesis of the illustrative flair of the French *livre d'artiste* and the typographical elegance of the English private presses."
 Gwyn Walters, former Keeper of the National Library of Wales, 1993

"All the books have in one way or other a stunning strength... In range and power no modern work in England compares with these by Shirley Jones."
 Colin Franklin, *Private Library*, 1988


 Shirley Jones, Red Hen Press, Byddwn Uchaf, Llanhamlach, Brecon LD3 7SU, UK. Telephone: (0 or 44) 1874-665-453

That year, 1995, was my first major exhibition in Wales: a twenty year retrospective at the National Library of Wales, at which I gave a talk about my work. It was beautifully mounted, with my books as easily viewed, of course, as the prints from them.



It was the beginning of a very good relationship with the Library, and its Rare Book Librarians, but Gwyn Walters, then Keeper of Rare Books at the Library, had opened my first exhibition in Wales, at Brecknock Museum and Art Gallery. Huw Ceiriog Jones, who succeeded him, continued to collect my books – and we still exchange Christmas cards and news, while Timothy Cutts, who succeeded Huw, has built a substantial collection of my books, by acquiring earlier books, when available, as well as new work.

Etched in Autumn, which I finally published in 1997, was very much a response to a time and place in my life.

Our new home is in a particularly beautiful part of Wales: Brecon Beacons National Park, and this is the view from my studio window.



That ‘season of mist and mellow fruitfulness’, the incredible views from our window, combined with the fact that I couldn’t use my fine purpose-built etching studio, land-locked as it was, with packing cases, induced me to start writing. A series of haiku, initially, threatened to evolve into a poem of epic proportions before my studio

was finally operational. This was laid aside, to be taken up and re-shaped the following autumn as a lyrical poem, to be accompanied by five folders embossed with blind-printed etchings of local flora and fauna – and my cats! Each one encases a mezzotint landscape of views near our home.

This is a postcard of one of the mezzotints, ‘*Beacons in Moonlight*’, and a line from the poem:



*“The sound of silence on fern-filled moors
High on a hill in Powys.”*

Now the ink in a mezzotint plate is of such density, that off-setting is always a problem, necessitating interleaving of some sort between the image and the facing page in a book. I had tried glassine, but its waxiness I found very unsympathetic to the velvety quality of the mezzotint it was facing, and single sheets of tissue often inadequate. I decided

it was worth the extra expense to use a denser Japanese tissue, and I chose Unryushi, a beautiful, subtly figured tissue, which was, of course, acid free.

I then thought of printing, on the Unryushi, passages of my poem which begins with the biblical, 'Comfort me with apples'. This becomes an extended metaphor for the storehouse of my life, stocked in old age, with recollections, 'like colours bright remembered, when my sight has faded'.

I had been assured it couldn't be done, the Unryushi was too thin, but I discovered that if I put a sheet of polyester behind it, the text printed very well. It entailed wiping clean the polyester each time, before the next print was taken, of course. But it worked! The mezzotint landscapes are seen first, emerging from the Unryushi, like an autumn mist.

*'Comfort me with apples'
Now in the autumn of my years
Lay up a storehouse against
The deprivations of my final days
For winter is before me
And the cold will surely come.*

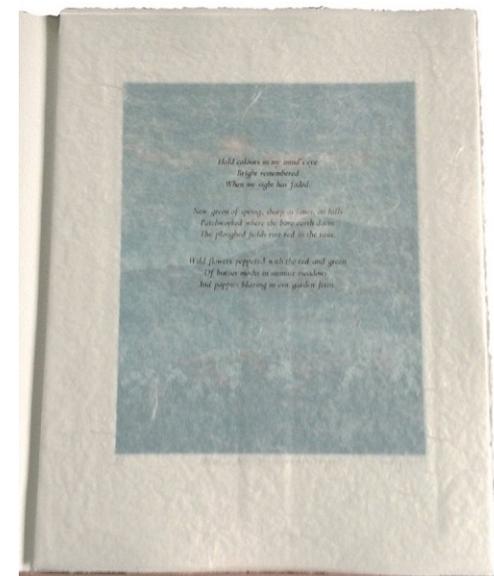
*Hold colours in my mind's eye
Bright remembered
When my sight has faded.*

*New green of spring, sharp as limes, on hills
Patchworked where the bare earth dawns
The ploughed fields rust red in the rain.*

*Wild flowers peppered with the red and green
Of burnet moths in summer meadows.
And poppies blazing in our garden ferns.*

*When the green of oak and hawthorn
Change to red and tawny shades
And baked by the sun of summer
The reeds at Llangorse lake turn
Biscuit brown and dry
Then comfort me with the whiteness
Of the swans, and with their gracefulness.*

Poem 'Comfort Me with Apples'



Llangors from Llangasty, with part of the poem printed on the Unryushi

Without the Unryushi

Llym Awel was the beginning of a widening and deepening articulation of a concern for Welsh landscape, but also for its history and culture, resulting in 1999, in a book, which I called, *Y Morgrugyn Cloff*.

I had been urged to tackle *The Mabinogion*, the collective name now given to eleven medieval prose tales, the result of centuries of storytelling. I selected seven tales, translated my favourite passages, and wove my narrative around them.

The images evolved effortlessly, though not always translated easily into printmaking.

My first choice was always mezzotint, perfect for capturing a feeling of mystery, a sense of ‘otherness’, which the tales called for, many of them rooted in the world of Celtic mythology. These tales called for dark greens, with gilding, gold being highly prized by the Celts and, of course, enhancing my images! But where I felt an image worked better with etching and aquatint, that was the medium I opted for.

My title is borrowed from the oldest tale, *Culhwch and Olwen*. One of the tasks Ysbaddaden Chief Giant sets Culhwch as a price for winning his daughter, Olwen, is to gather in one day, nine hestors of sown flax seed to make a linen veil for her wedding. Help is given by grateful ants, ‘with none of it wanting save for a single flax seed, and a lame ant brought that in before nightfall’.

My own contribution to these tales came late, and my handicap, not being a Welsh scholar, as great as ‘y morgrugyn cloff’ – the lame ant.

For *Culhwch and Olwen*, I used the portal stone of New Grange passage, in Ireland, since Ireland was where the hunt for the giant boar, Twrch Trwyth began. I used it as a perch for Gwrhŷr Interpreter of Tongues, who was sent by King Arthur, to negotiate with one of Twrch’s young pigs, for the comb, razor and shears that lay between the ears of Twrch Trwyth.

This was the first of many fine bindings, by John Sewell, expertly made to my design. And this was the

first time I made my own endpapers: paste papers loosely figuring the letter 'm'.

The Negotiation



The binding





This is a photo of me with Richard Price, looking at a copy of my last book

In September 1999, in response to another letter from me, Richard Price now Curator, Modern British Collections at the British Library, thanked me for the catalogue, but commented that the Library very rarely purchased items direct from a press based in the United Kingdom, but added that, because he would like the Library, and other legal deposit libraries, to clarify this question, could he ask me to bear with them

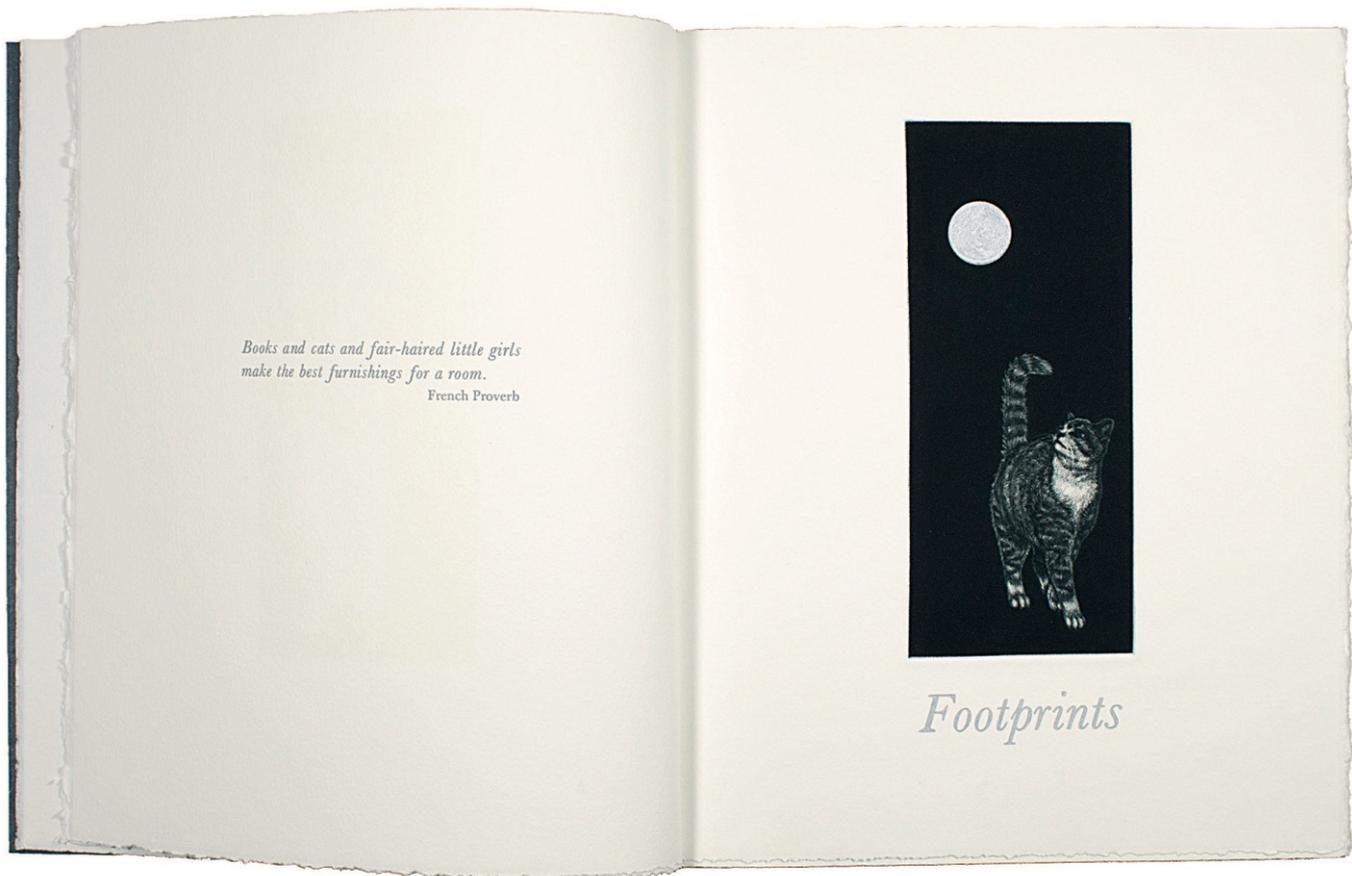
for the time being. It was signed, ‘With all good wishes’, and I hoped that was a good sign.

In reply to his letter, I commented that I had, over the years, deposited five of my publications with the various libraries entitled to copies, that they were all limited edition books, but not Artist’s Books. I enclosed a copy of my final letter to the Copyright Receipt Office, and Phillip Madden’s reply to that letter, and hoped that this clarified the situation for him.

I don’t know if this helped, but clarification was agreed, and Richard proceeded to purchase my Artist’s Books and continued to do so, and I began to look forward to delivering each new book to the Library, and being greeted by someone invariably welcoming and appreciative.

Jeremy Jenkins at Contemporary British Collections, who took that photo, commented in a review, ‘Recently, we were pleased to welcome the internationally acclaimed Welsh book artist, Shirley Jones of Red Hen Press, who visited us to deliver a copy of her latest work, *The Quest*. *The Quest* represents an Artist’s Book of the very highest order. The book contains five of the most sumptuous coloured mezzotint plates, augmented with gold. Jones’ skill and experience as a book artist is plain to see from her reimagining of this folk tale, drawn from the middle Welsh epic, *Culhwch and Olwen*.’ ... It goes on, but that’s the best bit!

So the ‘saga’ had a good end.

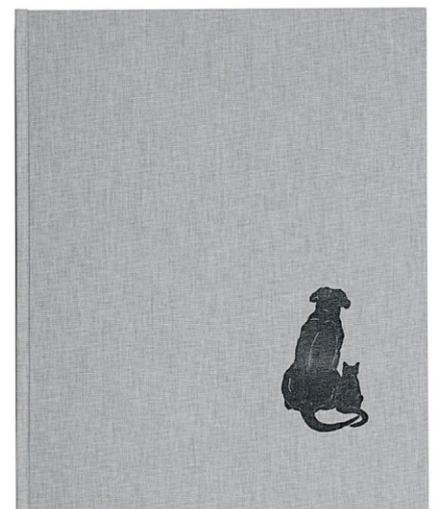


Footprints, published in 2000, was a book I dedicated to our four granddaughters – the only grandchildren we had at that time, which is something I have to point out to the three boys, and a girl, who all came later.

In *Footprints* I traced the lives, in mezzotint, of all our family pets over a period of almost forty years. I have, I should say, confined myself to the various cats and dogs who have all enriched our lives, since I have never managed to form a meaningful relationship with a hamster or a goldfish.

I had devoted a whole book – albeit a small one – to our lovable Persian, Gladstone. Tabitha was cut from a very different cloth.

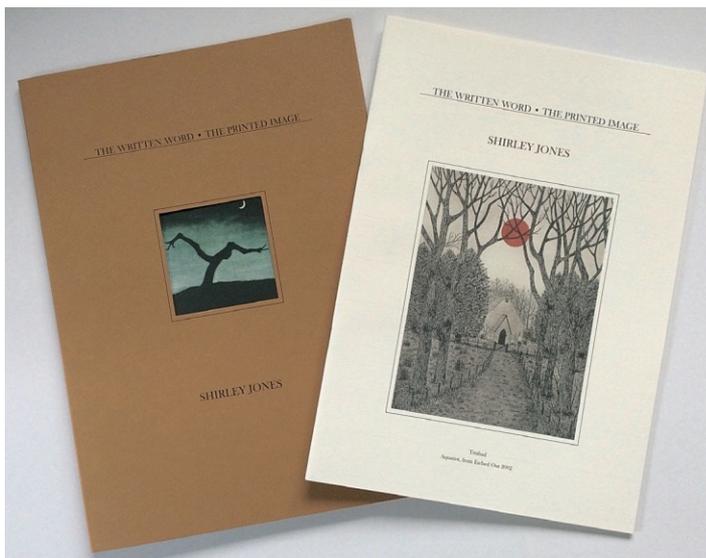
She was two years old, when she came to us from an army camp, which might explain her manners on meeting our own cat. She launched such a screaming invective at him, our large, dignified Burmese recoiled in horror. He didn't know how to deal with her. It was his home; he was there first; he was BIGGER! He stood this behaviour for a week, and then he boxed her ears, after which she treated him with grudging deference. Her previous owners said of



Magnus and Tabitha



her mother, 'She's a real trooper, been all over with us'. And Tabitha was too, braving wind, rain and muddy fields to go for walks with us. Our lovely, fearless little cat finally ventured across our country road, but never reached the other side.



Etched Out was finished in 2002, in time for an exhibition at Newport Museum and Art Gallery, to mark twenty-five years of The Red Hen Press. It was beautifully mounted, with a handsome catalogue!

The title, *Etched Out*, is a *double entendre*. The five landscapes are etchings. The story, almost forgotten, is of the close-knit, Welsh-speaking community evicted from their homes, so that the land on which their farms

had survived for over four hundred years could be turned into an army firing range. The date was 1940, and more terrible events were happening throughout Europe, but I felt it was still a tragic story that needed retelling. In every way I could, I became a 'remembrancer', in the making of my book.

I retold the tale, which I printed as a small booklet, the text set for me at Gwasg Gregynog/The Gregynog Press. I worked a pull-out mezzotint, thirty-eight inches long, depicting people who lived there at that time, with advice as to clothing and footwear, from The Welsh National Museum of History, at St Fagans. And I overprinted the names of fifty of the farms that were destroyed. The final image is a mezzotint of burning sheep, because the story of the Epynt doesn't end there.

Sixty years later, the country was in the grip of a Foot and Mouth disease epidemic, and the Epynt, remote and still army occupied, had been designated a suitable site for the burning of thousands of animal carcasses, transported in lorries from as far afield as the North of England. This was despite the fact that the Epynt was right in the heart of a vast sheep and cattle farming area, previously free of Foot and Mouth disease.

The paper enclosing the text and images was to be handmade for me, by Maureen Richardson, using earth from the Epynt, but, on our first attempt to collect the earth, we were turned away by men in white overalls. We timed our second attempt carefully, and my husband succeeded in digging out the earth, which we took away in a plastic bag!

In the making, Maureen incorporated fragments of dried fern, which we thought was appropriate.



The names of the farms are printed on the pull out mezzotint

John Sewell succeeded in realising my complicated design of a three part book-form box, the story, and the pull-out mezzotint, folded to the same size, each lying in a recess in the box lids. The image is of the wild ponies, because they too, were evicted.



Chweddlau, the book I published in 2005, was my exploration into fifteen centuries of the rich brew that is Welsh legend, myth, folklore and history, the demarcation lines frequently obscure. Wales abounds in sacred places, pagan and Christian: there are holy wells and shrines, standing stones and Celtic crosses, but also dragons who inhabited mountainous regions, while elsewhere maidens lived in lakes, and sometimes married the sons of men.

The legend of Llyn y Fan Fach has survived in manuscript form, and as an orally transmitted folk tale. It's a fascinating blend of Celtic myth, folk lore and historical fact.

About the close of the 12th century, a farmer who married a lake maiden from Llyn y Fan Fach, near Myddfai, despite her father's pre-nuptial warning, struck her lightly, on three occasions. And back to the lake she went, along with the assorted livestock she'd brought with her as her

dowry. No one knows what became of her husband, but it seems she appeared again to her sons, and told her eldest, Rhiwallon, that he should become a physician. Giving him a bag of medicinal herbs, she instructed all three in the ways of healing. They became the famous Physicians of Myddfai who, generation after generation, practised as physicians.

History records that the last to practise medicine at Myddfai, were David Jones and John Jones, Surgeons. But their last descendant was Sir John Williams, a physician to Queen Victoria.

My image is composed of three mezzotint plates, cut to size, the flowers all officially medicinal! I avoided colour; they are not, after all, meant to feature in a gardening book! I wanted mystery, not realism. Similarly, I did not want a realistic lake maiden! The figure and symbols are based on early stone carvings, the bag of medicinal herbs I highlighted with gold dust.

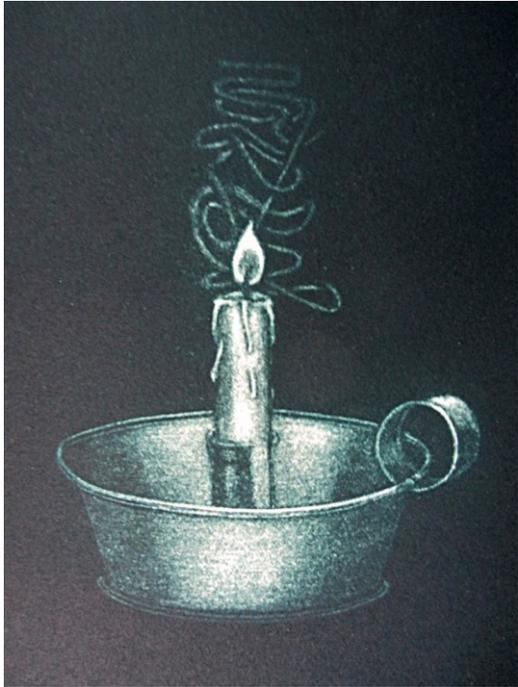


*The Physicians of
Myddfai*

My final chapter was called, 'Llên Werin', or folklore, an important part of the culture and history of all nations.

Unquestioning belief in supernatural phenomena prevailed in Wales well into the nineteenth century. The countrymen who left the land to work in the coal mines of South Wales, took their beliefs with them, and very prominent was a fear of the 'canhwyllau cyrff', the corpse candles, always seen when a death would occur.

In the early months of 1890, miners at Morfa Colliery, in the eastern valleys, had reported many uncanny incidents, and corpse candles were seen in the mine.



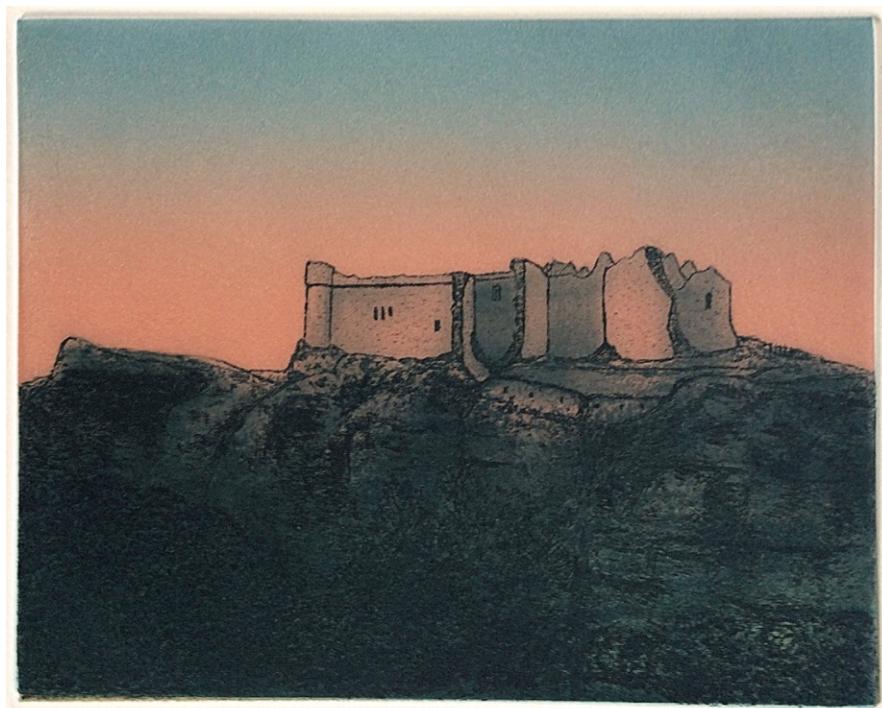
Llên Werin

On March 10th, nearly half the miners on the morning shift, unsettled by these portents, stayed at home. Late that day, there was a terrible explosion at the colliery, and eighty seven miners were killed.

Such tales were always told by candle-light, and I'll leave my reader with a mystery. My image for *Llên Werin* was a mezzotint, and as I've explained, the copperplate is rocked by hand, and the image burnished out by hand. I had burnished out the candle-holder, the candle, and the flame, before leaving the plate, carefully protected, overnight, in my locked studio. The following day, there was, on the copperplate, smoke above the flame. I had not burnished it out, and I still don't know how it came to be there.

Not a 'Llên Werin', but a 'Chwedl Wir' – a true story!

Taith Arall – An Other Journey, I published in 2007, was my commentary on Geraldus Cambrensis' tour of Wales in 1188, to preach for the The Third Crusade, and I digressed as freely as he did. Each of eight essays is prefigured with a blind-printed etching, and faces a full-page aquatint – but no mezzotints, so no digressing. But this is an aquatint from the book, *Carreg Cennen*.



Carreg Cennen.
Dylan Thomas called it
'King of Time'

Terra Contigua, or *Border Country*, which I published in 2009, was a visual response to the poetry of two 17th century poets, generally regarded as two of the finest Christian mystical poets in the English language: Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne.

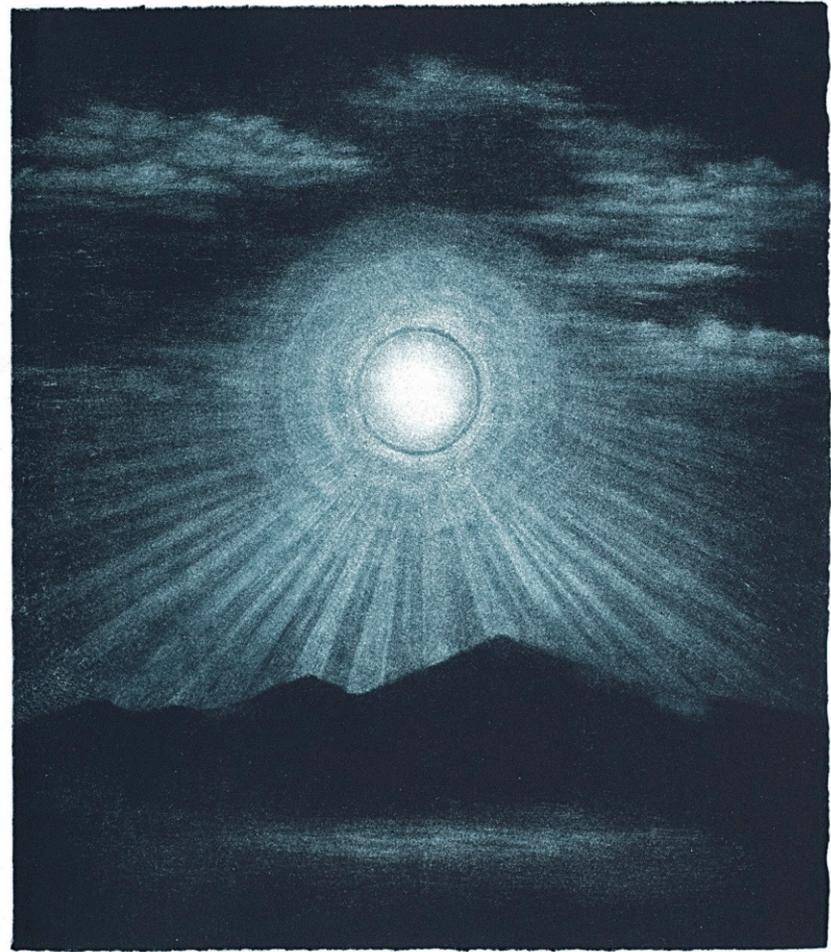
Born in the beautiful country on either side of the Welsh border, they never met, but they shared a sense of a living bond with the natural world.

Vaughan devoted his life to his poetry, and earning his living as a country physician. He lived near our home; and indeed, local legend has it that he spent his final years in it, having quarrelled with his family. There is no historical evidence to support that!

However, I chose specific local sites for my images, which I could relate to passages from his poetry, like the mezzotint of a visionary moon over the Brecon Beacons for:

*I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great ring of pure and endless light
All calm as it was bright.*

Although Vaughan lived to be seventy-four, Traherne died when he was just thirty-seven, and only one of his works was published in his lifetime. It was over two hundred years later that a book lover discovered, in the bargain basement of a London bookseller, what turned out to be the manuscript of Traherne's masterpiece: *The Centuries of Meditations*. It was not finally published until 1997, and C.S. Lewis called it, 'almost the most beautiful book in English'.

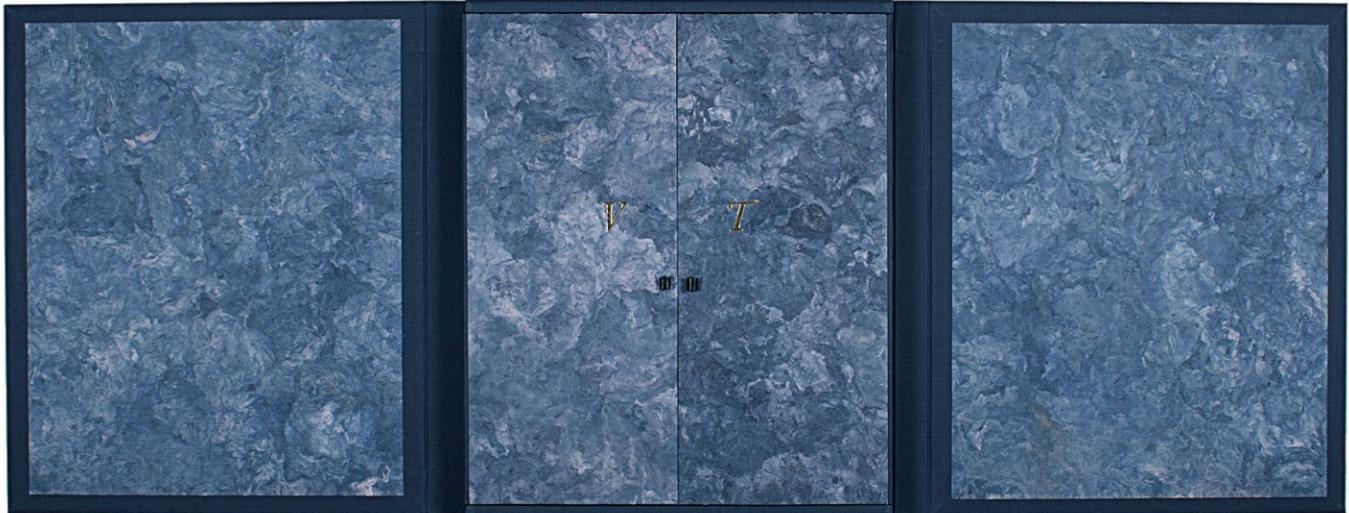


Written in lucid, metrical prose, it reminded me of the Psalms of David, and it was this quality I tried to transmit in my images, for there could be no specific site for lines like:

*The corn was orient and immortal
wheat, which never should be reaped
nor was ever sown. I thought it had
stood from everlasting to everlasting.*



The binding, beautifully executed to my design by John Sewell, has inserts of handmade paper by Maureen Richardson, the three-part binding covered in blue Amate, a handmade Mexican paper.



The ingenious opening 'buttons' are tiny leather 'sausages' John was particularly proud of, as I was of my setting and printing of the poems of Henry Vaughan.



*Happy those early days! when I
Shined in my Angel-infancy.
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race,
Or taught my soul to fancy aught
But a white, celestial thought,
When yet I had not walked above
A mile, or two, from my first love,
And looking back (at that short space,
Could see a glimpse of his bright face;
When on some gilded cloud, or flower
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity.*



*Search well another world; who studies this,
Travels in clouds, seeks manna, where none is.*

*Men might look and live as glow-worms shine,
And face the moon;
Wise Nicodemus saw such light
As made him know his God by night.*

*But life is, what none can express,
A quickness, which my God hath kissed.*

*Man is the shuttle, to whose winding quest
And passage through these looms
God ordered motion, but ordained no rest.*



Dolphins

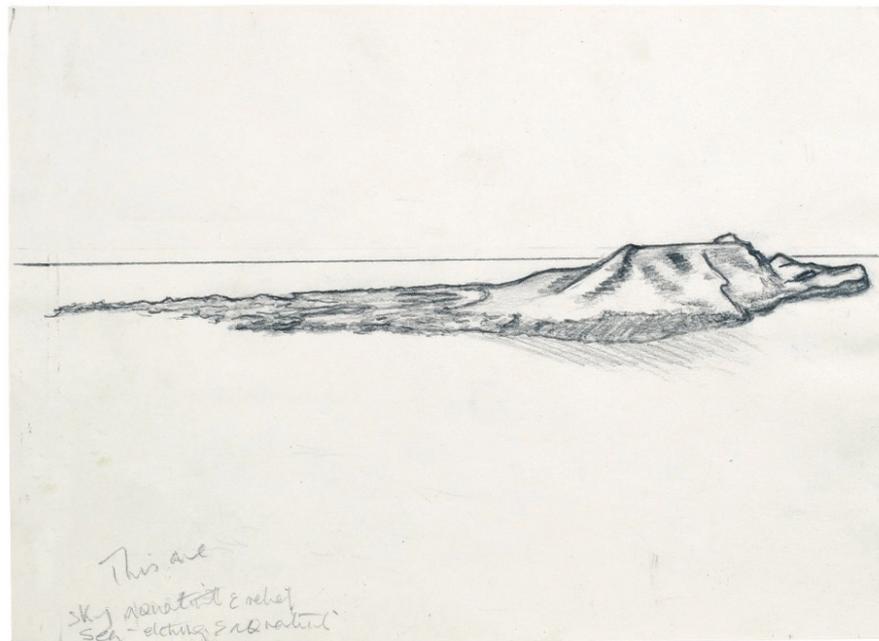
In 2011, I produced *A Thonnau Gwyllt y Mor/ And the Wild Waves of the Sea*, my commentary on Wales' coastline of contrasts, which boasts bays of unparalleled beauty, and long stretches of golden sands, but in winter a south west coast exposed to the full force of Atlantic storms, its cliffs and beaches, scenes of shipwrecks in modern and ancient times.

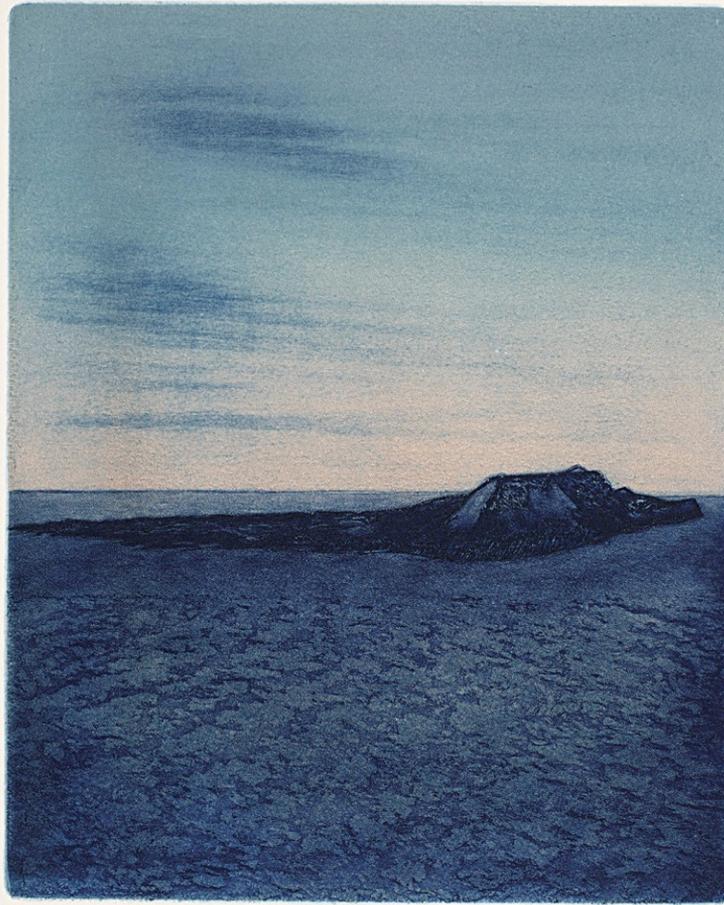
My introductory essay is followed by five poems and images, enclosed in folders, blind-printed with etchings of the sea creatures, seals and dolphins that frequent the islands and coastline of Wales.

The most dramatic feature of the south east coast is Worm's Head, a promontory that runs nearly a mile out to sea. At high tide, it becomes an island, the area connecting it to the mainland being then submerged. It looks uncannily like a great dragon winding its way out to sea, and rearing its head as it makes its final plunge into the waves. Over a thousand years ago, mariners named it the 'wurm', the Old English word for dragon. It can even roar, at times, when strong winds drive the breakers into the blowhole.

My etching of Worm's Head was based on my drawing, and photographs we took, on a bright, sunny day! So the

My drawing





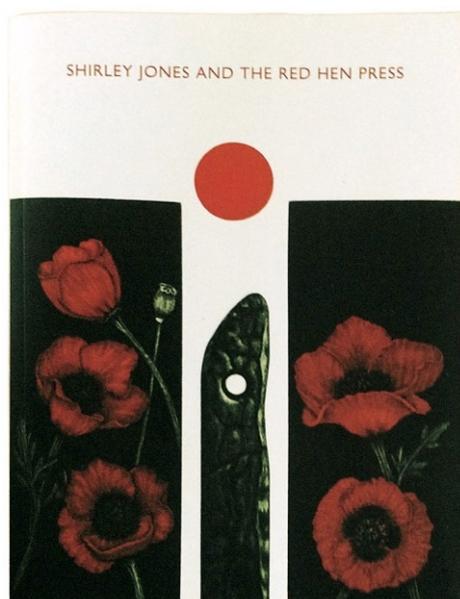
sombre setting was mine, better suited to the Old English poem, *Seafarer*, which I printed, along with my translation.

These are a few lines from the poem:

*I heard nothing there except the sea resounding,
The ice-cold wave, at times the song of the swan:
I took my delight in the cry of the gannet
And the sound of the curlew, not the laughter of men*

The original Old English was set especially for me by David Vickers at Gwasg Gregynog, because my Baskerville fount does not have some of the O.E. characters.

Þæt se mon ne wāt,
þe him on foldan fægrost limpeð,
hū ic earmecearig iscealdne sǣ
winter wunade wræccan lāstum
winemægum bidroren
bihongen hringicelum: hægl scūrum flēag.
Þær ic ne gehyrde būtan hlimman sǣ,
iscaldne wæg, hwilum ylfete song:
dyde ic mē tō gomene ganetes hlēoþor
and huilpan swēg fore hleahtor wera,
mǣw singende fore medodrince.
Stormas þær stānclifu bēotan, þær him
stea[n] oncwæð
isigfepera; ful oft þæt earn bigeal
ūrigfepra.



This was to be my final Artist's Book, marked by the publication of a bibliography by Ronald Patkus, Head of Special Collections at Vassar College, and supported by the Rare Book Librarians of three other American colleges, all of whom had large collections of my books.

In the process, it became a considerably more elaborate affair, the *Bibliography* extended to include a preface by Connell Gallagher, now Library Professor Emeritus of The University of Vermont, and over many years, a welcoming host. The introductory essay by Martin Antonetti, Curator of Rare Books at Smith College, was formulated during a two day visit Martin paid to my studio, our home and, with his family, experiencing Wales. Most importantly, of course, the *Bibliography* contained illustrations from all my books, with commentaries by me, along with the bibliographical details. The publication was accompanied by a travelling exhibition, to all four American colleges, including Swarthmore College Library, where a fine collection of my books had been built up first by Amy Morrison, and when Amy retired, continued by Ann Garrison, who bravely hosted that exhibition while terminally ill. To these, and many other American Rare Book Librarians, I owe thanks for their support over the years.

There were American booksellers too, who were responsible for selling my books to a vast number of Rare Book Libraries many of whom were quite unknown to me, but Anthony Garnett was in a class by himself.

He was an ex-Guards Officer, quintessentially English, and married to a former opera singer, their home a mansion built in the days of the St. Louis World Fair. Their house seemed crammed with big paintings and books. Even the spacious staircase had books piled along the sides, for Antony was famous in every American Rare Book Library I visited, his arrival in his old Volvo Estate, packed with books, looked forward to. He bought each new book of mine as soon as it was published, and in later years often unseen, and in multiples.

He was a perfect host, and became a good friend.

My final exhibition, in that autumn of 2013, was held at The National Museum and Galleries of Wales, where the *Bibliography* became the catalogue. Like the *Bibliography*, the exhibitions were entitled, *Shirley Jones And The Red Hen Press*. Both were to mark thirty years of the press I named in 1983.



The beautifully mounted exhibition was opened by William Gibbs, Chairman of the Brecknock Art Trust, and in his introduction, William made the wry comment that my hair was no longer red, but ‘a subtle shade of gold’. I don’t know who took this photo, but it captured my amusement and that of our two grandchildren, Bryn sharing the joke with Oliver Fairclough, the Keeper of Art.

But it wasn’t my last book! I was not quite ready to hang up my rubber gloves! In the spring of 2014, I had an urge to do another book based on a tale from *The Mabinogion*. This was the quest, in *Culhwch and Olwen*, to find Mabon Son of Modron, ‘who was taken, when three nights old, from between his mother and the wall’.

No modern thriller this! The ‘detectives’ appointed by King Arthur to find Mabon Son of Modrun were three of his magically endowed men, helped, in turn, on their quest, by the oldest animals. So, firmly in the world of Celtic mystery and magic. And mezzotint!

A Welsh scholar has identified probable locations, based on the creatures' place names. This quest, it seems, ranged from north west Wales to a tidal lake on the Severn Estuary!

A recurring image, for me, had been of an eagle, on a rock, pecking at the stars every evening – the Eagle of Gwernabwe. It was such an evocative image. I saw it as a dark green mezzotint with the stars highlighted in gold. But the tale had other evocative images, and the creatures, as each is introduced, are fleshed out as individual characters, with stories of their own to tell, and in every case an earnest desire to help. I knew I had another book in the making.

The Eagle of Gwernabwe appears in my book just as I had envisaged him, but in this quest, each creature, asked for information, establishes its own antiquity before naming a creature even older, who might be able to help the searchers.

The Eagle offers to take them to the Salmon of Llyn Lliw, who is more than helpful: 'As much as I know

I will tell. With every flood tide I travel up the river to a bend in the wall of Caer Lloyw; never before in my life have I found such wickedness as I found there. And so that you will believe me, let one of you come on my shoulders'.

And Mabon Son of Modrun is finally rescued from his stone prison.

The image is a deeply-bitten etched plate, framing a mezzotint of a jubilant salmon.

I finished my book in the spring of 2015, and I called it, simply, *The Quest*. It was an edition of just twenty-five copies, all I felt I could manage, with hands that were becoming increasingly



arthritic, and energy levels lower than they were. The book sold out very quickly.

In 2016, Timothy Cutts asked if I would give a talk about my work to the Aberystwyth Bibliographical Group, to be held in the National Library, and he would get out whichever of my books I would like to show. It was held in March, on a typically wet evening, but it was the most successful, and enjoyable talk I have ever given. I had a large number of my books, displayed over three long tables, so people could turn the pages. I suspect Tim might have been a bit anxious about this, but I wasn't; the paper in my books is invariably mould made, about three hundred gram weight, in other words very strong, and the people viewing them bibliophiles. After my powerpoint talk, I was able to join people looking at my books, answer questions, comment on particular images, and discourage those tempted to stroke the mezzotints!

I had called my last book, *The Quest*, and it really is my last book.

It occurs to me now, coming to the end of my Forty Year Journey, which has been as much about me, as my trials and triumphs with mezzotint, and my Artist's Books, how close in meaning is 'a quest' and 'a journey'. There is a sort of poetic irony in it, which appeals to me.



In my studio, at my
Rochat press



Printing Techniques

Mezzotint is a method of working from black to white, and is regarded as the most difficult of all printmaking techniques. A copperplate is prepared by rocking it evenly with a serrated steel tool, the plate being turned every five degrees. The rocker must follow precise lines, since it is important to avoid rocking over what has already been rocked, thereby flattening the burrs the rocker has already raised. When the plate is completely rocked, work can begin on the image, which is scraped or burnished out with a steel tool. Several proofs are taken on the etching press, to determine whether the image has been sufficiently scraped or burnished out. A first proof will often be depressingly black, even though the image seems clear enough on the plate, in which case, more scraping/burnishing is needed.

Etching is the reverse of mezzotint. Traditionally, a copperplate is prepared by laying a ground of beeswax and asphaltum on the plate, smoking the plate with a lighted taper, then drawing on it with a pointed tool. The plate is then bitten in acid, the length of the time determining the strength of the bitten lines. This is called hard ground etching. A soft ground etching is produced by using a ground to which tallow has been added, so that it doesn't harden. A variety of textures can be pressed into it, before biting in the acid. The two methods combined produces interesting prints.

Aquatint tones are produced by covering the plate with a rosin or asphaltum dust, heated until the particles adhere to the plate, then bitten in acid, the length of time determining the depth of the tone.

To print an image, etching ink is rubbed into the plate, then the surface wiped clean, so that the ink remains in the areas bitten in the acid. On the bed of the press, dampened paper is laid on the plate, and whether a mezzotint or an etching, covered with several felt blankets before running it through the etching press. The paper is then peeled off, revealing the image.

If no ink is used on a plate heavily bitten in the acid, this is called a **blind printed etching**, for example, the shell in *Falls the Shadow*.

Relief printing is when relief ink, not etching ink, is rolled out on a thick glass or perspex plate with an oversize roller, then transferred to the copper or zinc plate. If the plate has been deeply bitten, but no etching ink used, the relief ink rolled over, will sit on the plate's surface, and when printed, leave the image to print white through the surface colour, or colours.

Relief ink is also less opaque than etching ink, so is particularly effective in landscapes with large areas of sky.

Red Hen Press Artist's Books 1975–2016

| <i>Title</i> | <i>Edition</i> | <i>Size</i> | <i>Date</i> |
|--|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Words and Prints | 5 | 11½ x 10½ | 1975 |
| Windows | 12 | 15 x 13 | 1977 |
| The Same Sun | 25 | 17 x 14 | 1978 |
| Backgrounds | 25 | 13½ x 13¼ | 1979 |
| Rhymes for Our Times | 25 | 15 x 13½ | 1979 |
| Greek Dance | 40 | 15½ x 13½ | 1980 |
| Sunflower Rainflower Pale Morning Star | 50 | 20½ x 17½ | 1980 |
| Scop Hwŷlum Sang | 50 | 13½ x 11 | 1983 |
| Impressions | 40 | 14½ x 13 | 1984 |
| A Dark Side of the Sun | 30 | 11½ x 11½ | 1985 |
| Ellor-Gäst | 40 | 14 x 12½ | 1986 |
| Nocturne for Wales | 50 | 12 x 9 | 1987 |
| For Gladstone | 50 | 13 x 9 | 1988 |
| Soft Ground, Hard Ground | 40 | 11 x 13½ | 1989 |
| Five Flowers for My Father | 40 | 18 x 12½ | 1990 |
| Two Moons | 40 | 14½ x 13½ | 1991 |
| Ordinary Cats | 12 | 9½ x 6½ | 1992 |
| Llym Awel | 40 | 14¼ x 11 | 1993 |
| Falls the Shadow | 40 | 15 x 12 | 1995 |
| Etched in Autumn | 40 | 17 x 13 | 1997 |
| Y Morgrugyn Cloff | 40 | 15 x 12½ | 1999 |
| Footprints | 40 | 13 x 11¼ | 2000 |
| Etched Out | 40 | 8 x 7½ | 2002 |
| Chwedlau | 40 | 15¼ x 11¼ | 2005 |
| Taith Arall | 40 | 12¼ x 14½ | 2007 |
| Terra Contigua | 40 | 13 x 11 | 2009 |
| A Thonnau Gwyllt y Môr | 30 | 15 x 13 | 2011 |
| The Quest | 25 | 15½ x 13¼ | 2016 |

List of Institutional Collectors

Courtesy of Dr Ronald Patkus, who compiled the list for his Bibliography.

The following institutions hold publications by Shirley Jones and the Red Hen Press. Those with an asterisk maintain substantial collections (ten or more titles).

| | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| AUSTRALIA | Bowdoin College, Maine | Swarthmore College* |
| Frankston Public library | Brigham Young University | Temple University |
| | Brown University | Trinity College |
| CANADA | Bryn Mawr College | University of Arizona |
| McGill University | Bucknell University | University of California, |
| University of Alberta | Carnegie University | Berkeley |
| University of British Columbia | Claremont College | University of California, |
| University of Toronto | Cornell University* | Los Angeles |
| | Dallas Public Library | University of California, |
| GERMANY | Dartmouth College* | Santa Barbara |
| Gutenberg Museum | Dominican University of | University of Central Florida |
| Klingspor Museum | California | University of Chicago |
| Otto Schäfer Library | Duke University | University of Delaware |
| | Emory University | University of Florida |
| IRELAND | Evergreen State College | University of Georgia |
| Trinity College | Florida Atlantic University | University of Iowa* |
| | Folger Shakespeare Library, | University of Kansas |
| THE NETHERLANDS | Washington, DC | University of Missouri |
| Rijksmuseum, Museum van | Hamilton College | University of North Carolina |
| het Boek | Harvard University | University of Notre Dame |
| | Huntington Library | University of Ohio* |
| UNITED KINGDOM | Illinois State University* | University of Southern |
| Brecknock Museum and Art | Indiana University | California |
| Galleries | Kenyon College, Ohio | University of Texas |
| British Library* | Lafayette College, PA Library of | University of Tulsa |
| Cambridge University | Congress* | University of Vermont* |
| Cardiff University* | Louisiana State University | University of Virginia |
| Manchester Metropolitan | Metropolitan Museum of Art | University of Wisconsin |
| University | Miami University | Vanderbilt University, Tennessee |
| National Library of Scotland | New York Public Library | Vassar College* |
| National Library of Wales* | Newberry Library, Chicago | Virginia Tech |
| National Museum Wales* | Northern Illinois State | Wake Forest University |
| Oxford University | University | Washington University |
| Trinity College | Pennsylvania State University | Wellesley College* |
| University of the Arts | Princeton University | Western Michigan University |
| University of Wales Trinity | Rochester Institute of | Williams College* |
| St. David | Technology | Yale University |
| Victoria & Albert Museum | Savannah College of Art & | |
| | Design | |
| UNITED STATES | Skidmore College* | |
| Bates College | Smith College* | |
| Baylor University, Texas | Southern Methodist University | |
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- The complete collection of Red Hen Press books is at The Special Collections Library of Cardiff University, and is in the process of being digitised.

Poems & Text Reproduced from Some of the Images

From *Rhymes for our Times* on page nine:

“You’re a very fine swan, indeed!” said the ducks,
And many a girl –
Despairing at what her mirror showed her –
Hoped, someday,
For the magic metamorphosis,
And waiting, waiting,
Missed her true vocation –
To be a well-adjusted duck.



From *Backgrounds* on page ten:

John Keats proclaimed upon a Grecian Urn
That all we know, on Earth,
And all we need to know, is the simple law
That Truth is Beauty, Beauty Truth,
And thereby set a limit on our prying
Into the mysteries of the universe,
Or metaphysical questions of a life beyond.

Yet, Faustus-like, we strive for a knowledge
Limitless as an Infinity we cannot comprehend.
Awed, the more we learn, to plumb the depths
Of what we do not know.
And our ignorance still yawns before us.
A Jonah’s whale, to swallow us down
And spew us out, once more, a question mark.

Singing from *Backgrounds* on page eleven:

In my Welsh childhood, we would sing with Hwyl –
 Pianissimo was a foreign word, indeed,
 A discipline our teacher would impose on us.
 And every practice we'd oblige,
 And sing Pianissimo, at her command.
 And every concert, crammed on the tiny stage,
 In the gym that was our Albert Hall,
 We'd all ignore our teacher's frantic signs
 To lower our voices at the quiet bits,
 Forget her saying that someone's death
 Was not occasion to rejoice.

Maybe the starkness of our Rhondda tips,
 And the coal's black dust in all our homes
 Was what we were forgetting when we sang.
 For might as well tell songbirds in a cage
 To lower their voices, sing a song that's sad.
 For us, the sign to stand and sing
 Was like an invitation to a feast –
 And boy, we made a meal of all that music.



Hetty on page nineteen:

Hetty sat always by her husband's clock
 That never ticked to any rhythm of hers
 But tocked her life away, invidiously
 Unsynchronised.

She was no Ruth – uprooted but settling
 To live with Boas in an alien land
 For whom his people became her people
 Their ways her ways.

From her town to his was forty miles
 Its chapels, country manners and accent
 Not really so dissimilar to those
 She'd left behind.

Yet Hetty never felt at home there
 But let her roots for fifty restless years
 Keep her an exile, a dislocated
 Pendulum.

Francis on page nineteen:

Come on, who can sing?
 Cried the young nurses eager for a response
 From women withdrawn long ago from a world
 Out of harmony with their understanding.
 Depressives, psychotics, schizophrenics
 – Labels don't mean a thing –
 Each in her turn wrapped herself more tightly inwards
 As her name was called. Then
 Francis? Can you sing, Francis?
 Francis' face unscrewed slowly, her head
 Nodding in response to a half-remembered thought.
 Come on then, sing for us, Francis
 – Gently said and coaxing –
 And unbelievably, miraculously, Francis sang.
 'Love is the sweetest thing'
 Were the words that came in a voice
 So enchantingly sweet, the nurses held their breath.
 She bewitched them for a whole verse long and then
 Just as abruptly her face restored its grimace
 And all their coaxing, all their youthful charm
 Couldn't make Francis sing her song again.



My translation from *Ellor-gāst* on page twenty-four:

A sound arose, passing strange;
 a terrible fear came upon the North-Danes,
 upon each one who heard the shrieking
 from the outer wall. It was the adversary of God,
 howling a song of defeat, screaming out his pain.
 He who was the strongest of all men
 alive at that time held him fast.
 By no means would the defender of thanes
 allow that murderous intruder to escape alive,
 nor did he count his life of use to any man.

Then he who had, in malice, wrought so much evil
 against mankind, at war with God, perceived
 that his body would not serve him, but Hygelac's
 brave kinsman held him in his grasp, each
 a mortal enemy to the other. The hateful monster
 suffered grievous pain in his body; a huge wound
 gaped in his shoulder, the sinews sprang apart,
 his muscles bursting. Glory in battle was given
 to Beowulf. Grendel was forced to flee from there,
 mortally wounded, seek out his joyless abode
 under the marsh slopes; he knew full well that he
 had come to the end of his life, the full count
 of his days. After that deadly onslaught,
 the desire of all the Danes was fulfilled.

Thus did he who had come from afar,
 wise and valiant, cleanse Hrothgar's hall,
 release it from affliction. He rejoiced
 in his night's work, his glorious deeds.
 The prince of the Geats had made good his boast
 to the East-Danes, likewise had he made amends
 for their distress, the misery that all of them
 had endured formerly, the great hardship
 they had been forced to suffer – no slight wrong.
 It was a sign for all to see, when that
 fearless warrior put up under the vaulted roof
 a hand, arm and shoulder –
 the entire grasp of Grendel.



Gladstone on page twenty-nine:

You tipped the scale at eighteen pounds
 But when you moved,
 Long silver hair all floating
 Soft body undulating,
 Your avoirdupois you disproved
 And showed that grace in fat cats still abounds.

Five Flowers for My Father on page thirty:

My father's allotment lay at the back of our house – a plot of sooty, bramble-infested ground below the railway embankment. All his leisure time was devoted to painting, repairing, extending and generally improving that little terraced house, which first they rented, and later owned – and cultivating his allotment. He grew vegetables, soft fruit and even flowers in that unlikely soil, and when the opportunity came, he acquired the allotment adjacent to ours. The chickens which had blighted our tiny back garden were moved to this new ground, which they duly converted into a murky desert.

Their numbers increased – and so did my father's ambitions as a poultry keeper. He exchanged hens' eggs for ducks', and even persuaded one old matriarch of a hen to accept a goose egg. She hatched out a neurotic gander, called George, whose identity complex plagued him all his short life.

Once when I was helping to pluck the chickens we sold at Christmas, I complained about the mess and the smell. My father said quietly, as he pulled out some evil-smelling entrails, 'Oh I don't mind this. It's the killing of them I can't stand.' But he cared for and killed his chickens all those years because that was the way of it.

And that was the way for us too. My parents raised me without my ever knowing that we were poor, and they gave me an education they never had. Years later my father told me sadly, but without bitterness, 'I said goodbye to my little girl the day I put you on the train at Ystrad station – the day you left for university.'

*The Old Ones* from *Two Moons* on page thirty-one:

The old ones sit with the old ones, indifferent
To each other. Silent lips talking of
Times gone by to people who died
Long before.

White haired women watching, waiting,
Note each other's passing. A stopped watch
A clock out of sight irrationally
Disturbing.

They are governed by no moon now. Their sun's
Setting is mortally near – a rounding
Off they wish for but fear. Not death, you see,
Just the dying.

My translation from *Llym Awel* (*White Horses of Geraint fab Erbin*) on page thirty-seven:

Before Geraint, despoiler of the enemy,
I saw bowed horses, bloody from battle.
And after the shouting, bitter reflection.

Before Geraint, scourge of the enemy,
I saw white horses, bowed and bloody.
And after the shouting, a bitter grave.

Before Geraint, destroyer of the enemy,
I saw white horses, their coats all bloody.
And after the shouting, a bitter shroud.

In Llongborth I saw battle-fury
And biers without number,
And men all bloody from Geraint's onslaught.

In Llongborth I saw conflict:
Warriors in battle, knee deep in blood,
Before the great onslaught of Erbin's son.

In Llongborth I saw slaughter:
Warriors in fear and blood on skulls,
Before great Geraint, his father's son.

Fast ran the horses under Geraint's thighs,
Long-legged, grown sturdy on grain;
Swift as heath fire on mountain wastes.

Fast ran the horses under Geraint's thighs,
Long-legged, nurtured on grain;
Red with blood and swift as bold eagles.

Fast ran the horses under Geraint's thighs,
Long-legged, well fed on grain;
Red with blood and swift as white eagles.

Poem *Comfort me with apples* on page forty-three:

‘Comfort me with apples’
Now in the autumn of my years
Lay up a storehouse against
The deprivations of my final days
For winter is before me
And the cold will surely come.

Hold colours in my mind’s eye
Bright remembered
When my sight has faded.

New green of spring, sharp as limes, on hills
Patchworked where the bare earth darns
The ploughed fields rust red in the rain.

Wild flowers peppered with the red and green
Of burnet moths in summer meadows.
And poppies blazing in our garden ferns.

When the green of oak and hawthorn
Change to red and tawny shades
And baked by the sun of summer
The reeds at Llangorse lake turn
Biscuit brown and dry
Then comfort me with the whiteness
Of the swans, and with their gracefulness.

Excerpts from five poems by Henry Vaughan on page fifty-five:

Happy those early days! when I
 Shined in my Angel-infancy.
 Before I understood this place
 Appointed for my second race,
 Or taught my soul to fancy aught
 But a white, celestial thought,
 When yet I had not walked above
 A mile, or two, from my first love,
 And looking back (at that short space,)
 Could see a glimpse of his bright face;
 When on some gilded cloud, or flower
 My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
 And in those weaker glories spy
 Some shadows of eternity.



Search well another world; who studies this,
 Travels in clouds, seeks manna, where none is.



Men might look and live as glow-worms shine,
 And face the moon:
 Wise Nicodemus saw such light
 As made him know his God by night.



But life is, what none can express,
 A quickness, which my God hath kissed.



Man is the shuttle, to whose winding quest
 And passage through these looms
 God ordered motion, but ordained no rest.

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